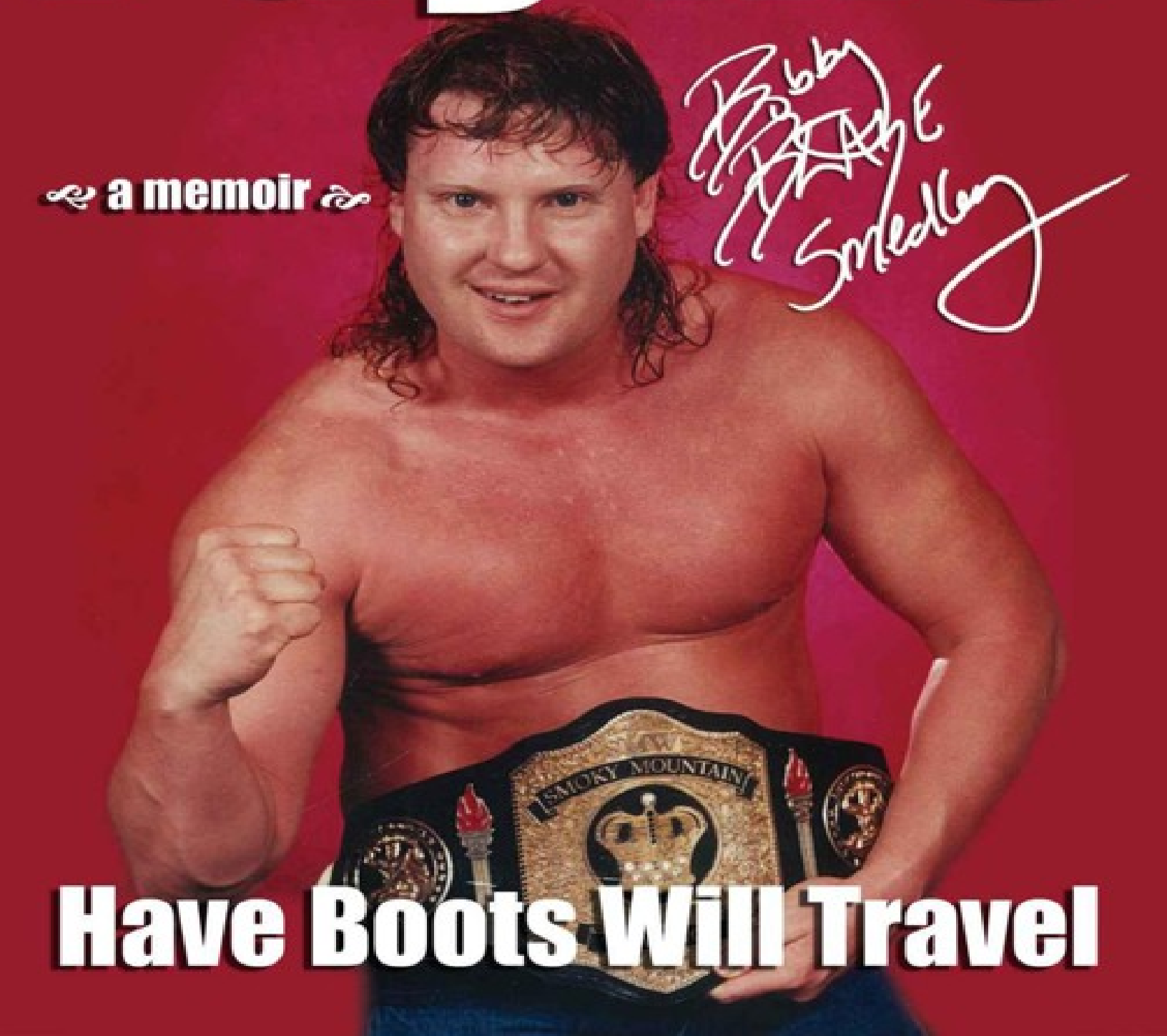
Pin me Pay me

a memoir



Have Boots Will Travel

Pin Me, Pay Me!

Have Boots Will Travel

a memoir

Bobby Blaze Smedley

Twenty Seventh Street Books
Ashland, Kentucky
© 2013 Robert Lee Smedley
All Rights Reserved

Dedication: This book is dedicated to Larry Simon, aka, The Great Professor Boris Malenko.

In Loving Memory of: Alvin and Elizabeth Romans; a hard working man and a loving mom. Granny Iris and Granny Gertrude; two grannies who knew it was real, and that in the end, the good guy will come back and win.

Acknowledgments: Danny Phillips, Jimm Smedley, Bobby Reynolds, Bill Hornbuckle, Bill Bitner, Matt Wolfe, Rick Newsome, and Joe Blizzard. My sons Drake Smedley and Brady Smedley. Special thanks to Jim Cornette. Thanks also to my wrestling brothers, and countless friends and family members who helped along the way on this incredible journey we call life. Thank you all!

foreword by Jim Cornette

Well I won't back down
No I won't back down
You can stand me up at the gates of Hell
But I won't back down

Every time I hear the lyrics to that song by Tom Petty, I smile and think of Bobby Blaze. No matter what life or Smoky Mountain Wrestling threw at him, he epitomized the meaning of that song, whether it be sending him into the ring against Ultimate Fighting Champions, booking him in godforsaken one-stoplight towns in the hills of Virginia, or challenging him to go out and steal the show from experienced veterans that were main eventing when he was still wetting his diapers, Bobby Blaze never backed down.

It was a pleasure not only dealing with Bobby from a personal standpoint, but watching him and his wrestling career evolve. From his start in SMW where it was his job to, as this book says, just get pinned and get paid, making my "stars" shine just a little brighter--to taking the next step working with the late Chris Candido in a series of matches that may not have been the main events but provided the most in-ring action on any card they were featured on--to finally, when the need was there to create a new, breakout, "homegrown" SMW champion, being the perfect fit and literally giving his blood, sweat and tears to achieve that goal.

Over the past 30 years I have dealt with, worked for and employed almost every name talent in pro wrestling. The ones who were never a problem, always showed up on time and with a positive attitude, and performed to their utmost to give the fans a great show and the promoter their money's worth can be contained on a much shorter list. Bobby Blaze, Ashland's second most famous native (read the book) fits high on that list. I enjoyed reading the account of his trials and triumphs, his setbacks and successes in this honest and forthright autobiography. I hope you will too. Pro wrestling needs more Bobby Blazes, and I'm glad I was able to play a small part in allowing him to achieve his dreams.

Jim Cornette
Louisville, Kentucky
June 2013

James E. Cornette

Table of Contents

one

Remembering When

“I have a hot memory, but I know I’ve forgotten many things, too, just squashed things in favor of survival.” Iggy Pop

two

Getting Started

“The greater danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.” Michelangelo Buonarroti

three

Some Brightness

“I see skies of blue...clouds of white...Bright blessed days...dark sacred nights...And I think to myself...what a wonderful world.” Louis Armstrong

four

Canada

Summer of 91 and 92

"Every worthwhile accomplishment has a price tag attached to it. The question is always whether you are willing to pay the price to attain it - in hard work, sacrifice, patience, faith, and endurance." John C. Maxwell

five

South Africa

“I was going to the worst place in the world, and I didn’t even know it yet.” Apocalypse Now

six

Australia 93’

“Once you pick up pen and paper, you can take people on a journey anywhere. The trouble is they come back later on and ask, ‘Is that true?’ I say, ‘Who gives a shit?’” Mark Brandon ‘Chopper’ Read

seven

Smoky Mountain Wrestling

“Bobby Blaze! The second most famous man from Ashland, Kentucky! Charles Manson being the first!” Jim Cornette

eight

Japan

Koketsu ni irazunba koji wo ezu: Japanese Quote. Literally: "If you do not enter the tiger's cave, you will not catch its cub." What? "Nothing ventured, nothing gained. You can't do anything without risking something."

nine

WCW

"The wrestling business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long concrete tunnel where thieves and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side." apologies to Hunter S. Thompson (a fellow Kentuckian)

ten

England Tour

"The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." William Blake

eleven

What Others Have To Say

"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are." Coach John Wooden

twelve

What's Going On In Bobby's World Today?

Persevering, that's what I'm trying to do. "It's a little like wrestling a gorilla. You don't quit when you're tired. You quit when the gorilla is tired."
Robert Strauss

preface

I first wanted to call this memoir Dark Sacred Nights. Then I had a change of heart about the title as, “Pin Me, Pay Me” is much more appropriate for the story and the stories herein. Believe it or not, beyond all the glitz and glamour that you see on a professional wrestling show, whether it’s on television or you’re at a live event, there’s a certain darkness behind the scenes. Professional wrestling, like most forms of show business or entertainment is not only extremely competitive, but much travel is required in order to make a living, thus the, “Have Boots, Will Travel.”

Here’s a quick peek into some of the darkness, most of “the boys” as the wrestlers are known behind the scenes have the attitude of, “Hooray for me, fuck you Jack,” as everyone is fighting for not only a position on the card, but most are just fighting to get a job in the business. Granted I met some of the best people of my life during my years as a wrestler, but when it comes to getting a job, holding a spot on the card, and keeping your job in the business, that’s just the attitude of many.

Professional wrestling also attracts people from all walks of life. Young boys who set goals to grow up to be professional wrestlers usually don’t have goals of also being addicted to prescription medications, alcohol, more and other illegal drugs, or to one day end up on disability because they can’t get out of bed in the morning even on a good day. Of course this isn’t true of everyone involved in professional wrestling, but the point is, there’s a dark side to being involved in entertainment for a living, especially something so physically demanding as wrestling. Of course the upside to all the glamour and lifestyle is the wrestler’s retirement plan: loneliness!

The business is sacred to many that enter. I, for one, still consider professional wrestling sacred. I love it, always have, and always will. I don’t even watch much pro wrestling on TV nowadays, but I talk about it every day to at least a handful of people who keep me abreast as to what’s happening in the business. It’s sacred to guys trying to draw their last pay check and to new guys who are busting their ass in some empty high school gym with the dream of making it to the big time someday. It’s a sacred way

for us because many based all of our hopes and dreams on the idea that one day we would perform on that sacred ground in the middle of a ring. But sometimes, even in the spotlight, it's a dark place.

To the many fans and followers of pro wrestling, it's sacred to them. They love it, thank God. Maybe they remember watching it on TV with their dear old grandmother and "by God, that bad guy better not cheat to win either." Maybe they got to go to the matches as a kid with their mom or dad and still cherish those memories. Those memories and many others that they shared through the years are sacred to them.

Grown men rolling around in a ring in their underwear as knights? Well you can decide that, but when the cameras stop rolling or the match is over, there's a different kind of night for these knights. Those guys you see up there in the ring have all paid a price. They come from all walks of life, from all corners of the world, and you can damn well bet they are super heroes to many. Maybe they shouldn't be classified as heroes, but for the veterans who drove up and down two lane blacktop roads before me so that I could have a career in something I loved doing, they're heroes and knights to me. There's probably a guy somewhere today working out in a cold gym who is starving himself to death so that one day he can perform on a big show, for your entertainment. One day he will be a knight to someone as well. It's a long dark road at times, but I wouldn't trade my life with anyone. I lived a dream. I hope that in this book about my life and professional wrestling, you will get a glimpse of how wrestling can be dark, sacred, and that there really are Dark, Sacred Knights and Nights! But, for me, I just wanted to wrestle, so just, "Pin Me, Pay Me," and I'll take my boots and travel to the next show for the next payoff. I hope you enjoy my journey.

introduction

This book is a lot more about working - wrestling in territories - versus being involved with the WWF/WWE or WCW, both of which I worked for at one time or another. I will go into more about working the territories as the stories unfold. I did a few “jobs” for the old WWF back in 1991 and 1992 on their Super Stars of wrestling program. I also had a lucrative contract deal with Turner Sports/WCW from 1997-2000. But, I started my wrestling career working on small independent shows and then worked in what used to be known as territories. Professional wrestling territories are dead. I know this first hand because I was one of the fortunate wrestlers who actually had the privilege to wrestle when there were a few small areas around the country to wrestle. Pro wrestling sure could benefit from having territories today. Territories would give young guys places to go to learn about having respect for the business, pay their dues, maybe make a buck or two, all the while learning their craft.

I enjoyed and had much success in what used to be the old Grand Prix Wrestling territory up in Canada, when it was based out of Moncton, New Brunswick. It was known as Canadian Professional Wrestling the summers of 1991 and ’92 when I wrestled there. I worked with some truly talented wrestlers, which included a bunch of hard working rookies and a few veterans who really showed me the ropes, pun intended. We worked seven nights a week. I also, after nine months of constant contact with Jim Cornette, landed a job working for Smoky Mountain Wrestling that was based out of Morristown, Tennessee.

I loved every night of the experience.

I have somehow become a beggar of my own demise. Broke and beaten down, I just have to get this out to the people, the fans, the friends, and the brothers that I’ve traveled with throughout the years. I have to let

everyone who is interested know about my story. It's a happy story, but one of many pains and sorrows along the way. But, there's no regrets!

Everyone always told me I should write a book. Absolutely God Damned right. Write a book. Well here is that book that so many have been waiting to read. Read with me through the anger, the blood, the sweat, and the tears of both laughter and pain. Enjoy? I sure as the hell did! I would do it all again, only harder, faster, and more of it, and maybe even better.

Why write a book? Well it's simple, I feel like I have had some pretty amazing things happen in my life, in and outside the ring. Trust me, I've also had some crazy experiences when I was involved in professional wrestling. I was an athlete, a professional wrestler. I have been all over the world, stayed in some of the finest hotels, but I have also slept in my car, slept in hotels rooms crammed with five or six other wrestlers, and even slept in airports to save money. I've eaten at some of the finest restaurants, enjoying thick juicy steaks but there were times when I survived on a can of tuna and a package of Ramen Noodles. I've lived my life to the fullest and have no regrets. I tried to leave no rock unturned. I've lived my dreams and died many deaths, and as sure as I'm writing this book, I am still trying to live my life to the fullest. I had the opportunity to fly around the world and never actually pay for one airline ticket. I've had great payoffs from weeks on the road and I've lived day to day where money was so tight that if it took a dime to travel the world I couldn't have crossed the street. Then within a day or two, I'd be right back on top. There's an old saying in the wrestling business, "Stick around this business for fifteen minutes and it'll change." This book, in effect should bring about some change as well.

So my friend, sit back and enjoy the show. But, let's make one thing crystal clear, right from the get go, before you read any further. Let's get one thing straight before you sit, white knuckled and questioning my life while reading this book. "Buyer fuckin' beware!" There, you have been forewarned about language, honesty, and brutal facts and truths. Being involved in professional wrestling permitted me to have controlled anger, anger that one usually doesn't express in everyday living. I never really got over that fact in the real world. One reason that I am so confrontational is

because in wrestling I could let that anger out. I have a hard time in my day-to-day life not being angry at others, and at not being pissed off at the world. I'm pretty controversial and confrontational in about every aspect of my life. But, I digress. So begins the journey.

SMED
THUR. 10-6-83

Lexington, Kentucky. That's where it
was at tonight. We got in early, 12:45 am.
We went to wrestling ~~to~~ tonight. It
was fantastic. I wanted to see the main
event; Jesse "The Body" Ventura. Ventura
stands 6'4" tall and weighs 275 pounds, and
you talk about a body. He fought
Jerry "The King" Lawler. Also ~~Lawler~~ Lawler had
in his corner, now dig this, The San Diego
Chicken. It was a wild night. I really
enjoyed myself.

I wish I had that hunger those men
have. I'm going to turn my hunger into
drive. I'm going to get the hunger to make
it to the top in whatever I do. It
~~don't~~ won't matter what I say but you
will see it in my eyes. Hunger, ~~drive~~
drive, dedication, discipline. It's like
this. If you have a goal - plan - action = dream,
but if you have goal + plan, action = reality.
Go for it.

one

Remembering When

“I have a hot memory, but I know I’ve forgotten many things, too, just squashed things in favor of survival.” Iggy Pop

Man, I thought to myself. I always say man. I say man way too much. “Man, I stayed up way too late last night to be getting up out of bed this early for basketball practice.”

“You up Smed?” I heard my friend Scott’s voice from across the room.

“I’m awake if that’s what you mean. But I’m still lying here, tired as heck.”

“Yeah, me too, but Dad said it’s time to get moving.”

Carefree and without a worry in the world, I climbed out of bed and put my basketball shoes and sweatshirt on, before heading into the living room.

The voice of “Handsome” Jimmy Valiant blasted from the television set on that early winter morning in 1978: “When I come to Memphis Daddy, I’m gonna take Jerry ‘Kingfish’ Lawler and I’m gonna beat him like it’s nothing. I’m not gonna come out here and brag about my 19 inch biceps. I’m gonna talk about how the boy from New York City is gonna come down to Memphis, Tennessee and take care of business Daddy, if ya know what I mean Daddy. Whoa, have mercy Daddy!”

Scott’s dad, Buck, said, “That’s pure crazy. Y’all ready for practice?” as he shook his head and walked away.

Scott was walking towards the door as well, but I still stood there mesmerized by the hugely muscled, long haired, bleached blond wrestler on

the TV.

“You see that,” I said. “That’s what I’m going to do when I grow up, be a pro wrestler.”

The cold air brought me back to reality as it hit my face and we headed out towards Buck’s truck. “Smed, that guy was pretty big.”

The three of us climbed into the vehicle and drove down the small city street towards Coles Junior High School for ball practice. Buck drove through the early morning winter weather as Scott and I kept talking about girls, wrestling, and basketball practice, with me doing most of the talking. “Yeah, one day! That will be me in the wrestling ring and on TV.”

darkness

Kids should get a chance to be kids. I wouldn’t trade my childhood for anyone else’s, and, as messed up as mine was, who would want it anyway? But, for the most part, as screwed up as my childhood was, I still had good friends, and a momma that cared for me.

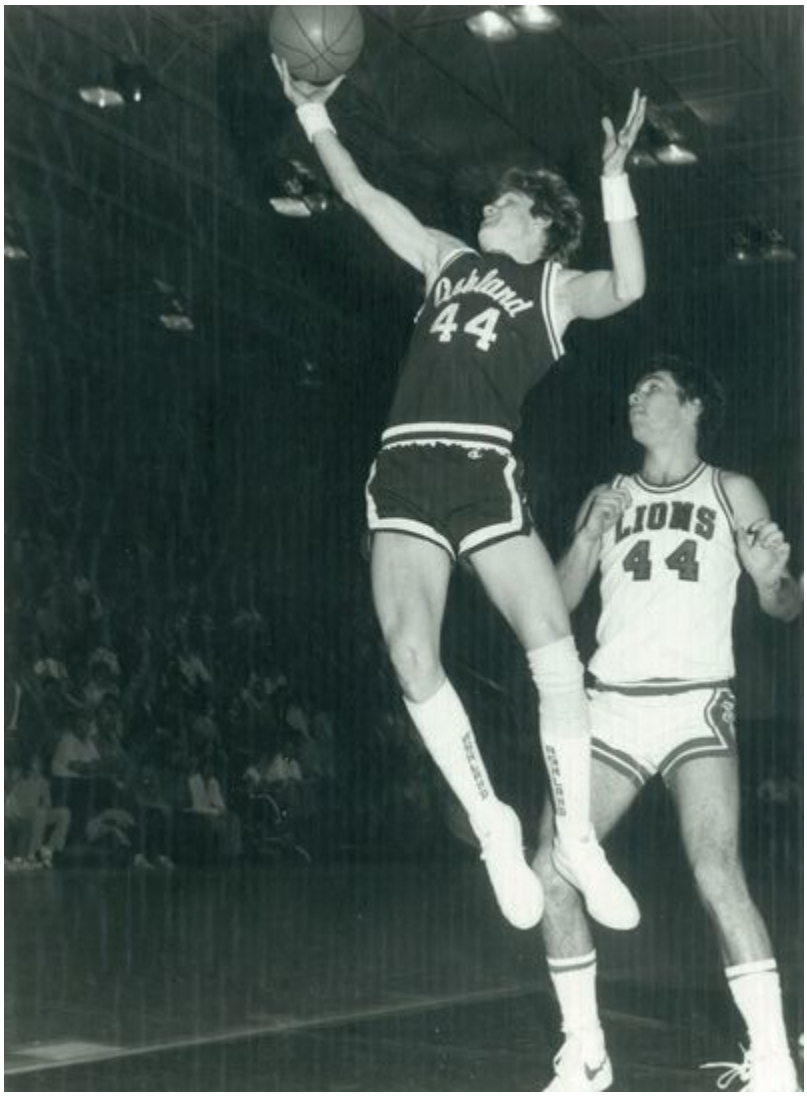
Like I stated in the foreword, wrestlers come from all walks of life, and I’m no different. All I ever wanted to be was a wrestler because my “soon to leave, never around anyway, don’t give a shit about me or my little brother” Dad made up some shit about being a wrestler or at least being around some wrestlers, or okay, well went to the matches and wanted to be a wrestler. What the fuck ever!

So I thought just maybe I could please him and make him stick around a little more and be just a little proud of me. So, I’ll be a wrestler. If wrestling my younger brother in our underwear makes him smile, I’ll wrestle lil Jimmy Mac. If he smiles, he must be happy. If he’s happy maybe he’ll stay around a few more days this time. Yep, wrestling it is then. A young boy seeking a father’s approval: well that’s a sure sign for future failures. So, wrestling it is when I grow up. Fuck off Dad! Glad you left!

In the meantime, maybe one day I'll find the father figure that I was always looking for in my youth. Any former coaches, teachers, or friends' dads who helped along the way, Big Thanks! This burning desire fueled me to want to become a professional wrestler, and as you will learn, Professor Boris Malenko filled this void. He was like a father figure to many boys, including me, through the years as he helped them prepare for a career in wrestling. So around the world we go! Welcome to my dark yet vibrant world in professional wrestling and the story of my life in this crazy savage world.

still night

The dream to be a wrestler that began so many years ago ends up being the nightmare that you go through to get there. It's not all the exercises that Malenko had you do, it's not all the bumps, hits, and training you go through when first starting out. It's the child who has a dream and the route that he takes to get there. Many men have overcome incredible odds to make it in the wrestling business. Many before me paid that price, and then some, to get into pro wrestling. Even more paid a higher price while eking out a living going from town to town, working while they were injured, missing out on holidays, birthdays, and other family functions, all for the love of the business and to entertain the fans. Some were even fortunate enough to make good money, maintain their health, and make it to superstar status, or even become "Champion of the World."



The way I looked at it was pretty basic: I came from a small town where I was a nobody and the only way I was going to be a somebody was through sports. I enjoyed playing basketball, and at one point I had a pretty good game, especially in street ball. I could dunk a basketball by the end of my ninth grade year at only five foot nine and my basketball skills would eventually lead me to playing some junior college basketball under Coach Cluster Howard at Lees Junior College in Jackson, Kentucky. We had a hell of a team, too. I loved playing football, too, especially in junior high school. My favorite sport was track and field. I was a good high jumper and could run pretty fast. I placed fourth in the high jump at the State Track and Field Meet in Lexington, Kentucky, my senior year with a jump of six feet, six inches in the Class 4A division. Sports kept me out of a lot of trouble while

in school and I’m thankful to the teachers and coaches who helped me through the years.

All this doesn’t seem too bad for a small kid who wasn’t blessed with the best of health from an early age. I was pissing blood at the age of five and I ended up at Baltimore City Hospital. If anyone was poor and ended up in a city hospital, especially Baltimore, you pretty much knew that your treatment was sub-par at best. I had a grandmother who retired as a nurse from Johns Hopkins, but being poor, I was sent to city hospital. It wasn’t the kind of place that you wanted to visit on a regular basis but I was there frequently. I still hate hospitals to this day.

After moving to Ashland “The Wasteland” Kentucky, things didn’t get much better as I was soon diagnosed with Rheumatic Fever and was told that if I so much as caught a sore throat, I could die. Yeah, that’s just what

every kid who loves and wants to play sports needs and wants to hear. It was at this time that I began to take penicillin two times per day for the next ten years of my life. I was told I'd never play sports the rest of my life. No shit! My joints hurt so fucking bad I couldn't get out of bed to walk. And then one day I just got up and dealt with the pain. What the fuck did they know about something called the human factor and the human spirit? So, by the grace of God, I began to not only walk but was able to run and play sports. Maybe I had what the late great Gordon Solie would call "Intestinal Fortitude."

I don't want to hear that bullshit line that they, including doctors and nurses, are there to help you, not hurt you. Tell that to a five year old getting a catheter, because it's about the same pain you'll get when you open your fucking bill if you're lucky enough to get sent home. Hospitals are all about money, and in the end, it's just a place to go before you die. Speaking of dying in a hospital, I had a nine month old baby brother die in one back in the early 70's because a single mother of three couldn't afford the best in health care, or pay for a good enough doctor to keep the kid alive. Stay the hell away from hospitals at all costs!

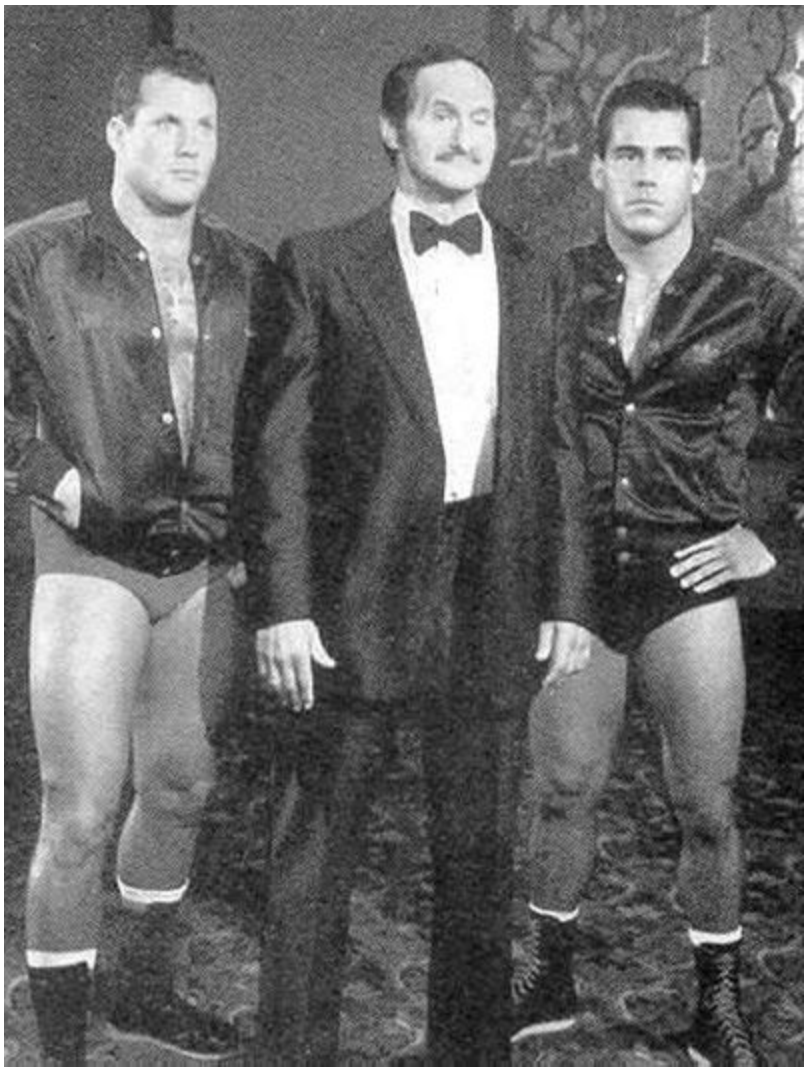
In all fairness I did have a great doctor as an adult, Dr. Loren Ledford, who was a huge wrestling fan, a great all around guy, and who helped keep me motivated and focused and helped me overcome many injuries. Let me tell you this: If you are lucky enough to find a good doctor like I had, keep him or her. Loren has sadly passed away, ironically, at a local hospital. A good doctor is hard to find, especially these days and I'm very lucky to have found another good doctor and I'm thankful that I did. Every one of them can't be the best, but you have to find the one that's best for you. I have been very fortunate that I once again have found one of the best in Dr. Timothy Hart.

Here's a light little anecdote about the importance of seeing a doctor as needed. This one's for you Loren.

Once after a leg injury, Malenko told me to, "Go train in the ocean; use a pool if you have to. You're from Kentucky. They train racehorses in pools when they're injured. It will do you some good." Malenko's son Dean, one of the wittiest people I've ever met, responded, "Yeah and when was the

last time you saw a racehorse in a wrestling match Dad? Bobby, go see a doctor!" Thanks Loren for being a friend, a fan of wrestling, one fine doctor, and a great human being.

Dean Malenko and Brad Armstrong were, without question, two of the most talented guys in the wrestling industry in my honest opinion. They were also, by far, two of the most quick-witted and funny guys I met in all my years of wrestling. Those two guys could just come up with stuff off the top of their heads that would just have anyone within earshot rolling with laughter. As Barry Horowitz once said, "If it ever came to a battle of wits, we would all be in a handicap match against Dean." The same can be said for Brad. Thanks for the laughs, "Mean Dalenko" as the old man at the retirement community home in Baltimore called him during a personal appearance.



Joe, Boris, and Dean Malenko

Pretty much the first six years of my life, I lived in Baltimore, Maryland. Tensions were high, but I didn't understand why. Many dying in foreign lands, racial tensions, school problems, marriage problems, all too much for a small child to understand. But through it all I saw and understood love. Later in life as I was fortunate enough to live a dream, I saw the world through different eyes. The same heart that had been broken had now mended somewhat in a town in which I soon made many friends. I also met a friend who is still my best friend to this day. I went to better schools. Years later during my wrestling career I learned two more important lessons. "Same, same!" And, "So much!" When I say "same same," it is a simple concept that, yes I agree with you and feel the same way, thus we shall go about our business in the same manner. And "so

much," as in so much love in the world. There's so much love in the world. There's also hope, if you keep hope alive and love alive in your heart, then that's a good thing.

Ashland, Kentucky, wasn't any place special when I was brought into this world. It was just another steel mill town, "Where Coal Meets Iron," located on the banks of the Ohio River. It's just a small town in Eastern Kentucky that borders on the tip of the southern-most part of Ohio, and southern West Virginia. I came to Ashland, Kentucky, from Baltimore, Maryland, in 1969 and lived in a predominantly black neighborhood and to this day skin color has nothing to do with my friendships. Still today, many people of many races are my brothers and sisters. My family never held any Jewish people in captivity, nor did they murder any. My wrestling coach and mentor was Jewish, and I have no problems towards any Jewish people.

I don't judge people. I think it's a good idea to always question authority, but don't judge, have empathy towards your fellow man. I have friends who are Mexicans (not Mexican'ts) and ironically I met them in Japan. I have no problem with Mexicans. The Japanese people that I have met and done business with are some of the most honest and hard working people I have ever met.

I had long hair most of my life and wore it especially long during my wrestling career. "All hail the Mullet!" It doesn't cover up my red neck, because it's not red, it's about as white as any other body part I have exposed. To my Native American friends, to my knowledge, I never took your land and I hate what took place in Wounded Knee, but I wasn't there. I have a couple of Indian friends, one of whom served time for just fighting to help keep what was his and his family's. Native Americans have my total respect. Rest in Peace, J. Medicine Hat! Another Native American, Willie Wilkinson Jr., was always a good friend to me, and good to me. I had first met him in Tampa and I toured Japan with Willie several times. He was proud of his heritage, a proud man, and a proud Indian. I respect that in him. Willie was one of the people who helped get me booked in Japan, and for that, I say thank you brother.

What you do and who you like is your business, I don't judge. We all bleed the same color when cut, my heart pumps American blood. So no

matter where your lineage or your ancestry starts, I pretty much care about one thing, human beings. We are humans and we all need to respect each other and not judge someone based on the color of their skin, where they are from, the clothes they wear, or the length of their hair, or the lifestyle they choose to live. Who am I to judge anyone?

It's all about respect. You want respect, earn it! You want to be accepted, accept others, you want love, love others! You want peace, be peaceful! You want to die, die with dignity, respect, and honor, and leave behind your legacy as one that showed peace, love, empathy, and kindness towards your fellow man. And if you can't be down with that then fuck it, not fuck you, but realize you got nothing coming if you're a bigot or racist. And I say that with peace, love, respect, and no judgment! Of course these are some of the lessons I had to learn as an adult, but they proved to be valuable lessons to me. Live free, respect all, fear none!

27th Street

Shortly after my arrival from Baltimore, I lived with my mom, and my baby brother. I guess the old man had decided to go set up shop elsewhere, so the three of us were pretty much stranded and broke. As mentioned we lived in a predominantly black neighborhood, more on that later, and we were poor. We weren't white trash, we were just poor. We did have a lot of love, so we were rich in something and that something was love.

We lived in a simple house that had been converted into two apartments on the corner of Winchester and 27th Street. There, we had a lovely view of everything that went down in the neighborhood on 27th Street. We had a McDonald's right beside our house, a car wash, a dairy, a barber, a drug dealer, a bootlegger, and a bunch of wild characters. We also had a good and fun group of kids to play with.

What in the world more could a kid ask for, when he had all this? Who would need more for that matter? I should also mention that my mom eventually found the love of her life and remarried, and I had a man who raised me and my brother as his own. He was a good man who was just as fair to me and my brother as his own children. Likewise my mom treated,

loved, and raised my new step siblings as her own. So now we had a much bigger family than the three of us. There was now a total of six kids plus the two adults all trying to adapt to our new life in the same house. It was trying at times, but everything worked out fine for our new family down on 27th Street.

Like most neighborhoods there were fights. If we weren't playing sports there were fights, and sometimes there were fights during our neighborhood games. For the most part, even if we did fight, we were all friends again by the end of the day. Since the earliest of times man has either had to run, swim, or fight. I chose to fight. I once ran from a guy throwing rocks at me and the rock still hit me, and it hurt. I had only seen swimming on TV, so the first time I jumped right off the edge of the diving board, having never actually swam, I sank, and the bastard lifeguard let me fight my way to the side of the pool before reaching down to help me out. Running from a fight with rocks didn't work, swimming damn near killed me, so I guess the only thing I had left to choose from was fighting.

It wasn't that I enjoyed fighting; it was just a hell of a lot safer than running and swimming for me. Besides once you've had your ass kicked by older guys in your neighborhood, it wasn't so bad, because it just makes you tougher, and the body heals quicker from a black eye or a bloody nose than from a rock that has busted your skull or eye open, and it's much less traumatic than, say, drowning.

Back to the wrestling. I mentioned I wanted to be a professional wrestler. Apart from watching wrestling on TV, I enjoyed watching Kung Fu Theater which aired right after the wrestling. Yeah, I enjoyed all those crazy 1970s Kung Fu movies with the goofy voiceovers and sound effects. It was probably all of the neighborhood fights that I got into that contributed to me wanting to be a better fighter, which in turn made me want to get into pro wrestling. I had seen these guys on television, and I had seen some in person at the armory, so I wanted to learn to be a better fighter and one day become a professional wrestler. To me, a pro wrestler on television was not only one of the coolest cats around, but he could also be one of meanest dudes as well. He looked good physically, could talk that smack, and back it up by snapping someone's vertebrae. Neck breakers and

pile drivers! Those guys were tough. “That’s one bad mutherf...watch your mouth.” Well it’s one bad combination! Plus, I thought maybe one day someone would be proud of me, and I would make something of myself through sports or by becoming a professional wrestler.

Little did I know of all the obstacles that I’d have to overcome to one day become a professional wrestler. Even though I loved 27th Street and loved having a neighborhood full of new friends, I also knew that one day I wanted out and off 27th Street. I guess you could say I was like a young Cosmo Carboni, granted I wouldn’t see *Paradise Alley* for several more years at this point in my life, but I did have a dream of getting out of my current living conditions. I was young and just dumb enough to know that I would do anything to eventually become a pro wrestler.

Like I said we had a whole lot of love in our small family, but we also held on to that hope. We had hope. Pro wrestling was my hope. Sometimes you have to take life on the chin and as tough as times may be, there is always hope for a better tomorrow. I always held on to that hope. As I got older and asked my mom, why we stayed in Ashland, she just said it was because she wanted to make it without having to return home to Baltimore, divorced, with two young children, and having to move back in with her mother. She wanted to make it on her own. She had hope! Ashland wasn’t that bad of a place. In fact, it was a great place to grow up. I loved it then even though I missed my grandmothers and my cousins. I had friends, a little brother, and I had my mom. What kind of mom did I have? Well, let’s just say I had one hell of a mother. She lived through many tough times, and had a very rough life but this only made her a stronger woman. For that I thank her because that’s where I got most of my toughness from and many of my survival skills from later in life. I had always heard that one of these days is none of these days, so I think this is about the time that I seriously knew that I was going to be a professional wrestler one day. Hopes, Desires, and Dreams. “We’re all just chasing a dream Bobby,” as Malenko would tell me many years later.

I still recall vividly being cut from the basketball team tryouts as a fourth grader. But, again, for whatever reason, my best friend at the time and to this day, Danny Phillips, a sixth grader at the time spoke with the

coach and since another kid had quit prior to the second practice, Coach Mike Tussey picked me up on the team.

Well, before the first game of that school year, the little skinny kid who had pissed blood, had bad knees, and had Rheumatic Fever, the one who had been cut was now a starter as a fourth grader in a fifth grade league. Coach Tussey was my first official coach. He was a policeman for the City of Ashland, and helped many young kids like myself through the years. He was also a sports broadcaster on several local radio stations. He was a good man who would eventually become a lifelong friend of mine. I spent many hours over at his house playing basketball, watching sports, and just hanging out with him and his sons and family. Yep, young male seeks adult male approval, only one more reason to do my best. I learned what hard work was, and I learned that through sports I could maybe make someone proud of me.

on danny phillps

When I first moved to 27th Street, there weren't too many white kids around. I mostly stuck with my little brother and Mom. Looking back, I loved that neighborhood as I learned many of the lessons of the streets and learned them fast. One of the best things that came from my move resulted in a lifelong friendship with my soon-to-be best friend for life. I am proud to say that Danny Phillips is my best friend to this day, some forty years later. Big Dan was not only my best friend, but my official big brother that I never had. No one could ever ask for a better friend. It didn't start off smooth, though. You might say it was rather rocky in the beginning between Big Dan and myself.

Since I was only allowed to play on my side of the street and on my side of the alley, I didn't venture too far down my block. One day while standing at the edge of my boundaries, near the alley, some big kid began throwing rocks at me. Of course, I reacted the only way I knew how, and that was to throw rocks back at him. As this rock fight escalated into an all out rock war, that big kid's mom, Judy, who would later become like a second mother to me, comes out yelling, "What are you throwing rocks for,

Danny? What are you throwing rocks for? Get in the house right now!" Funny? Yes. True? Yes. It happened.

I guess the ironic part is the fact that Danny and myself were two of the only white boys who lived on 27th Street and there we were fighting against each other. As time went on we learned to play with each other. We also would eventually play with and be accepted by many of the black kids as well. We would play baseball, football, kickball, tag, and yes, basketball with our black friends on a regular basis.

Before this happened though Danny and I still hadn't become friends yet. That happened a few weeks later when I found myself alone and out of nowhere, there stands Danny. "Oh man," I thought to myself, "There's that big kid that was throwing rocks at me. Now here I am alone and he is going to beat me to death." To my surprise, he says, "You wanna see something really corny?" I thought that this was just some kind of trap to get me to cross my boundary of the alley. I recall feeling a little uncomfortable stepping out of my little comfort zone. Was he trying to get me back behind some houses in the alley to just have a reason to beat me up? But I took that chance and said yes to him while trying to show no fear. "Look here," he says as he points to a dog turd that was black, brown, and had corn sticking out of it. I just laughed my ass off, as he did the same. He told me his name was Danny, and I told him that I was Robert and we have been friends ever since. Thanks Danny for the kind friendship for all these years my friend.

armory

So at the age of 15, I had pretty much made up my mind to be a wrestler. I had gone to all the local shows that I could as a fan. I had met and shook hands with André the Giant in Huntington, West Virginia. That's the same year I met and had a cool conversation with Randy "The Macho Man" Savage when he was struggling to get noticed working for the old ICW. This is also the year that I watched Terry Funk as "Frankie the Thumper" star along with Sylvester Stallone in, "Paradise Alley." Yep, wrestling was where it was at for me.

Again, I didn't realize the odds of making it in the wrestling business. It seemed like I was always overcoming odds from an early age and through my young adulthood. I didn't mind the fact that it seemed like I was fighting against the odds to ever get into pro wrestling. I had seen the wrestling on television, I had been a fan, and as mentioned I would sneak into the Ashland National Guard Armory. I wasn't satisfied just getting into the building to watch the matches I was excited about the idea that one day I too could be in that ring. Now this was a little ten or eleven year-old kid, actually thinking that he could be a wrestler.

Even back then I was true to my own spirit. I had my own ambitions and aspirations and by-god if it killed me or one of those damned wrestlers killed me, so be it, I wanted to be just like them. I wanted to be the one in that ring, wrestling! Yep, Mr. Malenko, "We're all just chasing a dream." I was just fortunate enough to have met you and got to actually make a dream come true through hope, desire, and having a dream.

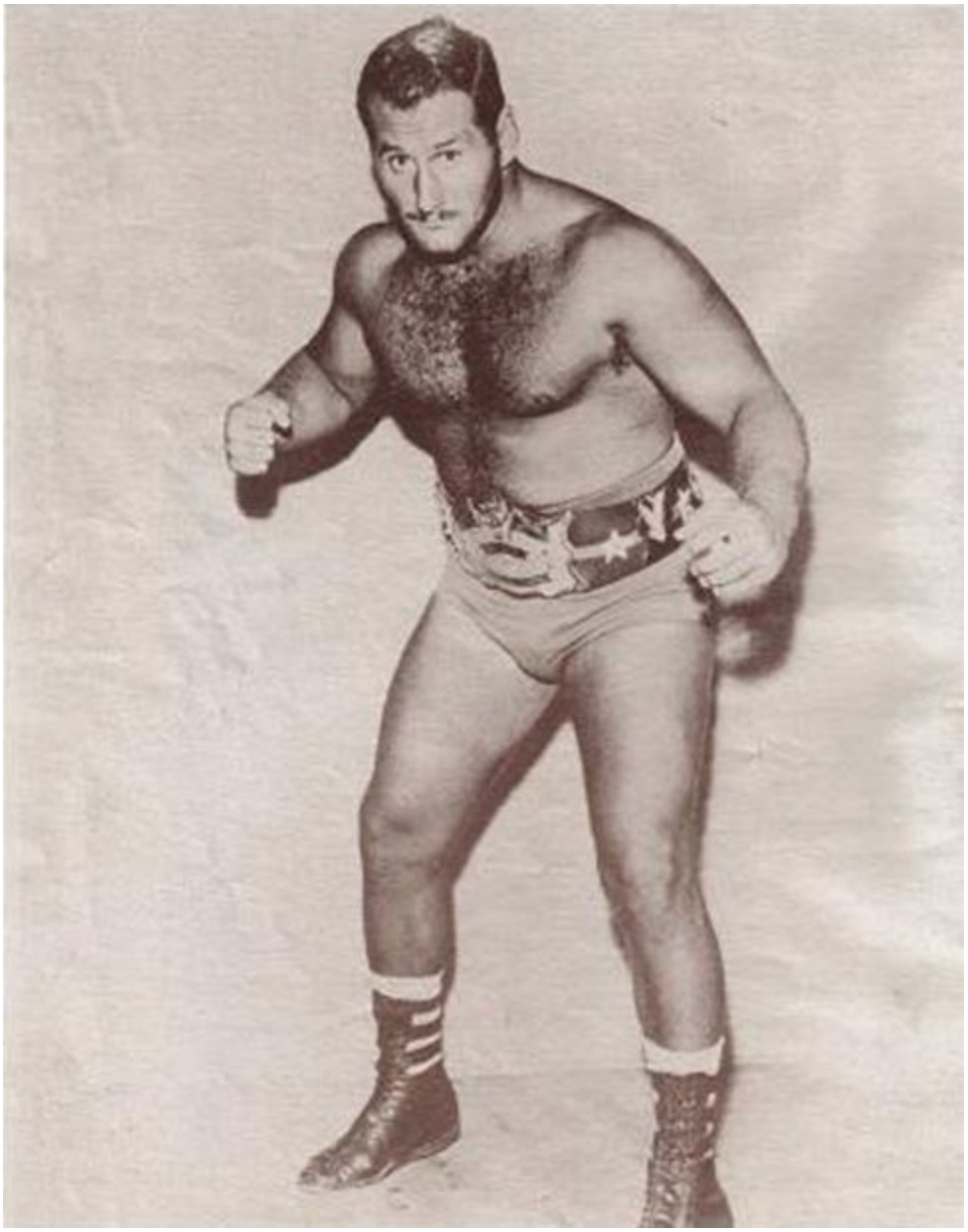
How was I to know that I was about to get into this strange self-destructive, crazy, unpredictable area of life when I first got into professional wrestling? But, as I've been told, I march to the beat of a different drummer. Hell I didn't even know I was listening to the drummer let alone a marching band. I was just living my life! Yep, I was living my life, my way. That's the only way it ever was for me.

Many years later I got to come back to that armory and guess what? I was in that ring. I was on a professional wrestling show, in the ring, in an actual match. And, of all the places I've wrestled around the world, I still love wrestling at the armory in little ol' Ashland, Kentucky.

At the age of 21, I knew everything! Yeah right! So, I dropped out of college and desperately tried to get into professional wrestling. I was now training even harder with weights. My health and conditioning were improving through all the workouts. It wasn't until I met Malenko that I really learned about "conditioning."

Through hard work in the weight room and having played sports and with a desire to break into the world of professional wrestling, the little skinny kid that had pissed blood, had bad knees, the one that was told he

could die from a sore throat because of the Rheumatic Fever, in spite of everything else that had happened in his life, not only did he walk again, but he was about to become a professional wrestler. That kid made his debut on September 11, 1988 in Haysi, Virginia, against Rick Newsome.



The Great Malenko

two

Getting Started

“The greater danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.” Michelangelo Buonarroti

From first match anxiety to first match confidence it all began on September 11, 1988. I drove to the town of Haysi, Virginia, for my very first pro wrestling match. I remember driving from my small hometown of Ashland, Kentucky, on my first of many trips down Route 23, “The Country Music Highway.” Many of country music’s greatest stars from Kentucky have sections of this highway named after them. The list includes the likes of Ricky Skaggs, Loretta Lynn, Patty Loveless, and Dwight Yoakam. The section near my home in Boyd County is named for the Judds. It would be a few more years before a then unknown Billy Ray Cyrus would have a neighboring section named after him. I mention these names as these are, for the most part the ones that had sections of, “The Country Music Highway” named after them that I would drive through on a regular basis once I got on with Smoky Mountain Wrestling. I always enjoyed driving, so the five hour trip down a road known for hauling coal, country music legends, and hilly, crooked curves was exciting.

After walking into the locker room of the local high school gym I was met by other wrestlers who didn’t seem to care if I was there or not, and hell, half seemed as if they didn’t care if they were even there. They didn’t seem to be anxious. They just seemed to be there. I wasn’t nervous about being in the third match on a six match card, but I was concerned about just getting in the ring and getting my match over with, without screwing something up, and without getting my butt kicked by my opponent. I was looking for any way possible to get into the sport of pro wrestling.

Rick was a nice enough guy and had been involved in several professional matches and had been a bodybuilder who had agreed to help

train me just a few months beforehand. Again, this was before I actually met The Great Malenko.

Rick may have never steered me wrong before, but he also had not "smartened me up" enough yet to know that pretty much anything goes, except that the finish would be predetermined. Of course he was "going over," winning the match, and rightfully so. This match and about twenty others took place prior to meeting The Great Malenko. I had been in touch with Malenko via letters and phone conversations about his training school in Tampa FL. One of the first letters that I received back from the Malenko Camp wasn't actually from Malenko, but a gentleman by the name of Mr. Marvin Joel, who then put me in touch with Malenko himself. Marvin, thank you sir, I am forever grateful for the letters you wrote and for informing me about the Malenko Camp.

The smell of the locker room and the gym were the same as just about any other locker room or gym in any town, USA. The "heels" or bad guys were in the girls locker room and that's where I was, right where I always wanted to be, in the girls locker room. Only I was in there with a bunch of hairy legged guys and a couple that actually shaved their legs, not the desired effect I was looking for in a girl's gym class locker room if you know what I mean.

Hell, I always thought if I could get into the girls locker room, I'd get a chance to see some naked girls. All I saw were elbows and assholes. But, I knew enough to keep my mouth shut and just listen. That is to the wrestlers that did talk, as not much talking was going on. They didn't know if I was "smartened up to the business" or not.

As I would later find out, when match two was over, it was time for the "next cartoon." It was time for my first official match. I would like to tell you I remember everything about that match, but honestly I can't, it was all a blur. I recall walking to the ring, and also seeing about five hundred people in the audience. I also remember most all of them seemed to hate me like I was the Devil himself, as if I was there to crucify them all for missing church earlier on this fine Sunday afternoon. Rick "beat" me in my first match, and since he was the, "baby face" all those good church going fans were happy. I guess maybe I did something right. I got beat! Me, the "heel,"

the bad guy got pinned and that's what these fans had cheered for and wanted. Pin me, pay me, I just had my first match. I was paid $35.00 and was treated to a free pizza dinner. I was happy, one happy guy.

All in all it was a great experience to have my first pro wrestling match. I eventually had about another ten or fifteen matches before I went down to Tampa and entered The Malenko Camp. I had used the name Super Destroyer III in that first match. I had a blue mask and was billed from "parts unknown," of course. Another little known fact is that the first ring name I used before going by Bobby Blaze, was "D.B. Smedrock." The D.B. stood for "Damn Bad!" Of course the Smedrock was just a play off my last name as many had called me, "Smed," all during my earlier school and sports years. I also wrestled as "Kendo, The Samurai," who was a henchman for Jake "The Snake" Roberts while I was in SMW. By the way, has anyone ever seen a Samurai with blue eyes? Another character name I used was, "The Paralyzer," on a bunch of independent shows, and of course that was under a mask as well. Why do wrestlers wear masks? I'll answer that question a little later on into my story. The most fun I had using a mask was on a "Halloween Scream" show in West "By-God" Virginia, when I dressed as a scarecrow. I was "The Scare Crow!" I had a hat, mask, flannel shirt, overalls, and of course had straw and hay stuffing inside my clothes. I was going to be facing, "Buzz Saw" Brian Jones. I had a manager on this night. Every time I took a bump, straw and hay would fly out of my gimmick outfit. It was hilarious, especially when, in a high pitched voice the manager would yell out, "He's beating the stuffing out of him ref. Somebody help him! Oh my!" Fun times indeed.

Anyway, yes it felt good to be in my first match. But, even after my first official contract some years later and having to "work"-wrestle 76 straight nights, then one night off and doing another 32 matches without a day off with a few double shots on Sundays thrown in, I still didn't feel like I had made it. It wasn't until at least two more full-time tours that I actually felt like, "Brother, it's good to be home. This is where I belong." That day and thought came to me more during a match on a tour of Australia called "Wrestle Riot 93." That thought is still so vivid in my mind; that I actually felt comfortable in my career choice. "Yes this is the life I have chosen and I'm damn glad I did." From the anxiety and blur of that first match in

Virginia, to lying in the middle of the ring in Australia five years later, after taking a bump from a perfectly executed arm-drag by my former training and travel partner Rico Federico, I knew, “Hey, I belong in this dance.”

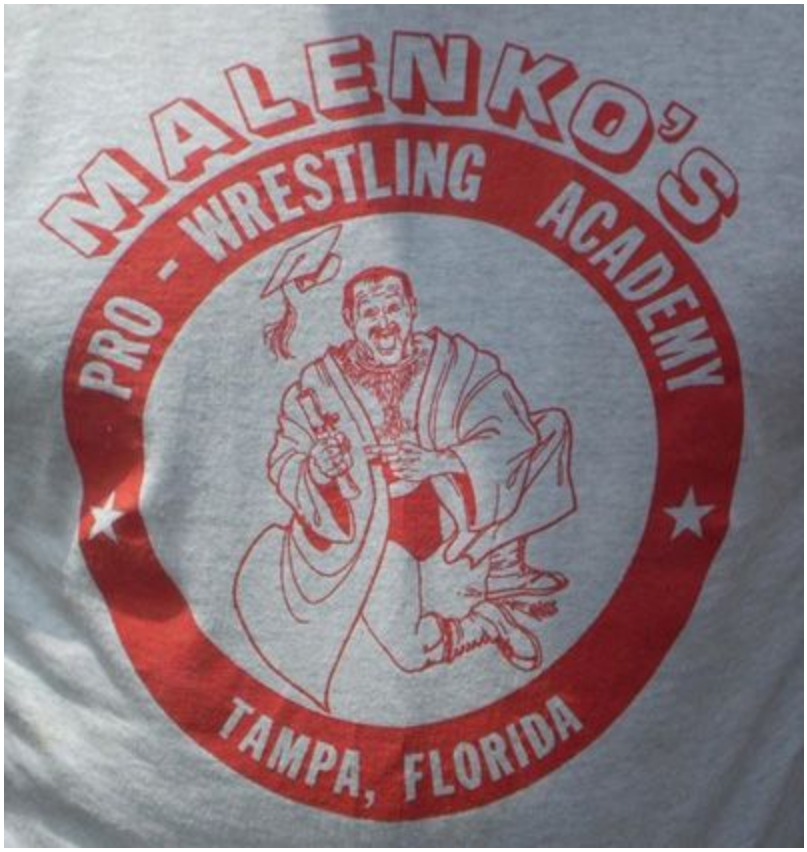
Even after all the required proper training and the promises of being in a “lucrative business,” there’s no guarantee you’ll ever make the big time. After five years of hard work, dedication, discipline, and determination I felt that I had finally made it as a professional wrestler. At this point in my career I had probably had somewhere between 420 to 450 matches professionally, so with that being said, that just goes to show you, that even with all the dedication, training, and matches, professional wrestling is hard work and it takes a tough person to stick it out in order to make it in the wrestling business. It was at this moment, at this point, under those bright lights in Brisbane, Australia, that I realized that I finally had the talent that it would take to make me a successful professional. I knew in my heart of hearts that I had tried and I knew that by giving it my best shot this wrestling dream was really beginning to pay off.

If you’re new to the business, or you have a desire to make it as a professional wrestler the best advice that I can give you is make sure that you at least know you gave it your all and did your absolute best. Trust me when I say, trying and giving it your all is a far better cry than not trying to do anything at all with your life. There’s an old proverb, along the lines of, “Better to live a day as a lion, than a lifetime as a lamb.” This applies to any aspect of one’s life no matter what your life’s calling may be. Doing nothing and not having a dream and to be nothing at all in life, to me, is not having a life. I wanted to live my life, my way. I wanted to make myself successful, and to be somebody!

Even though I had had my first match and several more in between I still had a long way to go. Onwards and upwards was my thinking. I knew that I needed to get this better training that I spoke of or I was just going to be a hack at best and never truly make it in the wrestling world. So after that first match and, as mentioned, several in between matches I finally had an opportunity to better myself when I took off for a professional wrestling camp in Tampa, Florida. Little did I know how my life was about to change.

wrestling camp

Wrestling Camp, Tampa, Florida, God, how long had I dreamed of one day becoming a professional wrestler? I can remember watching pro wrestling since I was a kid. I watched the old WWWF in Baltimore with one of my aunts and at times with my grandmother. Later when we moved, and more about that in a bit, I can actually recall seeing an interview on the old Memphis TV at fifteen. It's the one I referred to earlier where Valiant was cutting his promo about his upcoming match with Lawler. I know it was at that time that I said to myself, "That's what I want to do; I want to be a professional wrestler." Prior to this memory it was my lil brother Jimmy Mac who said that I had to see this incredible wrestling move from the Memphis shows that we would watch on those early Saturday mornings. It was a "sunset flip" and it was sweet to see. The Memphis wrestling was different from what we had watched in Baltimore, but it was pure by-god wrestling, and we loved it.



Back to Tampa, that place can be so hot in the middle of August. I had forgotten that anything worth having in life isn't free and it sure as hell doesn't come easy. Did I have dreams of money, success and fame? Not at all, no ILLUSIONS of GRANDEUR here. I didn't have any of those desires; all I had was that of the desired effect that I had seen on television and at local matches for so many years, to just be in the middle of the ring wrestling. I didn't realize you had to actually be "conditioned" as Malenko called this part of his training regimen. As I was busting out a set of "tens-and-ones" in that humid, hot, Tampa sun, I had romanticized the idea of just being out in the spotlight, not out in the sun. One of the earliest exercises that Malenko had me doing was what he called tens and ones. It's a combination exercise that involves doing ten Hindu squats and pushups. You start out doing ten Hindu squats and one pushup, then do nine Hindu squats and two pushups and you just keep reducing the Hindu squats and increasing the pushups until you have reached the half way point of doing one Hindu squat and ten pushups. At this point you may want to puke, but you're only half way finished as you then begin to work your way backwards by doing another ten pushups, and one Hindu squat, and then nine pushups and two Hindu squats, and you finally reach a finish when you have done the last of the ten Hindu squats and one last pushup. It's basically like climbing a mountain or a peak before descending down the other side. Once you can complete a set of ten and ones, you then begin, and it will take awhile when you first start to complete this task, but you then start working on your time, and try to complete the exercise at a quicker pace as your conditioning continues to get better and better. There's other variations to combining the two exercises, like doing 100 straight Hindu squats and then doing 50 Hindu Pushups, which are much harder than a regular pushup, that will get you in great shape really quick. Doing neck bridges for one to three minutes after doing the Hindu squats and pushups completed this stage of the workout. You then had to do stretches followed by actual "ring work," by wrestling one or more guys before the day was over at Malenko's. Here I was actually working my ass off to get in better shape, and my fun filled fantasy of becoming a professional wrestler was becoming more of a hellish, horrible nightmare. Those ten-and-ones, in that sun, were just what I needed, and although I didn't know it at the time, "the old man" sure did. And he pushed me until I finished every last Hindu squat and push-up combination, until I just wished I'd wake up from "my

dream.” This reality was just a little bit different on the first day of my arrival at Malenko’s Wrestling Camp. If I only knew!

malenko

“First you learn to wrestle, then you learn to make money.” It takes a person several years to learn how to be a good worker. I was just talking to a guy the other day about all the training and time I had to put in to become a good worker. And, believe me, even though I had thought when I was younger, “Oh yeah, I could do that,” I had no idea just how hard it would be to actually become good enough to make money. Any number of guys can claim that they are pro wrestlers, but there’s a limited amount of guys that are actually good in-ring performers. And, believe me I know the difference. I was trained by one of the all-time best craftsmen in the business, Professor Boris Malenko. Malenko not only became my wrestling coach, he became my friend, my teacher, and my mentor. As he once said, “Bobby I’ll teach you everything you know, but not everything I know.” The man had a way with words. I will include several Malenkoisms throughout the book, which could be an entire book in itself. “The ocean is nature’s whirlpool.” That one was always good for any leg injury. Any upper body injury, especially a shoulder injury, “Overhead pulls or overhead pull downs, lots of reps, as many as you can do, as many sets as you can do.”

Lawrence Simon was better known by his professional wrestling ring name, Boris Malenko, or “Professor” Boris Malenko. Malenko’s wrestling name “The Great Malenko” was a pun; “Malenko” means “little” in Russian, and Boris was shorter than most of his fellow wrestlers. He owned and operated a couple of gyms in the Tampa Bay, FL area where he trained many young wrestlers. Some of the boys that Malenko trained were Buddy Landel, and both Masked Super Stars, Bill Edie, and Bob Cook. He also trained Sean Waltman, Barry Horowitz, Norman Smiley, and too many others to mention. X-Pac, Jumbo Beretta, Rico Federico, and Haystacks Calhoun Jr. were just a few of the guys that were there training while I was in the Malenko Camp. He was the father of now-retired wrestlers Joe and Dean Malenko. Malenko knew wrestling holds and moves inside and out.

He knew how to wrestle, shoot, and how to hook. But, he also was known for “The Malenko Stomp” which later became “The Garvin Stomp” used by Ronnie Garvin. Malenko was also one of the first men to be involved in “Russian Chain Matches,” ironically with Garvin. These matches must have been brutal blood baths from what I’ve been told and also from seeing some of the photos that hung on the walls at the Malenko gym, taken from these matches. Malenko also defeated Eddie Graham to win his first “Brass Knuckles” title back in the late 1960s.

One of the most important aspects of training with Malenko was his knowledge of “conditioning.” He was well respected in and outside the wrestling business for his motivation and dedication to help others get in shape, stay in shape, and how one can overall improve their health through conditioning and exercise.

Sometimes in life and probably, more often than not, you have to make changes in the way you think in order to succeed. With this change comes resistance, but if you don’t resist the change, and actually accept the fact that someone has “been there, done that,” you can and will actually learn how to become better at wrestling or in doing your job. I remember back to the days I was trying really hard to break into professional wrestling.

Now, please remember with me, this was before it was called sports entertainment, and it wasn’t very easy to get into. Once you broke in, it was still hard, as others didn’t/wouldn’t “show you the ropes” so to say. I can understand this now, as those others didn’t want you to “steal/replace” them on the card, after all everyone was trying to make a living. The professional wrestling business was a very protected business.

Nowadays the only guys that make a living from that business are the ones under contract with one of the bigger companies, and God bless them I hope they save their money. I can also say, with great pride, there’s no bitterness when I see guys actually making a living by doing something they love to do, especially if they are good in-ring performers.

Thinking back to when I was trying to get into the business, one of the funniest things that ever happened to me was when my brother and I were still going to all the wrestling shows we could. One of my uncles, who

loved professional wrestling about as much, if not more than me and my brother, had gone to a show with us in Huntington, West Virginia. The three of us saw Don “The Rock” Morocco heading out from the side curtain towards the concessions area. We ran over there and were just mesmerized by his size. He went to the counter and ordered three large draft beers. Well, before any other fans could get to him, we all started asking him questions about how to get bigger, how do we get into pro wrestling, and anything that we could think of to get his attention. Morocco pays for the three beers, that were in large paper cups and begins to try to balance them as he is seemingly ignoring the three goofballs bombarding him with moronic questions about wrestling. “Hey Morocco, how do we get into professional wrestling?” Then, he does the strangest, yet funniest thing ever. He looks at us, as if he might ask us to help carry one of the beers, or if he may actually tell us the secret about getting into pro wrestling. He sets all three beers down on a table near the back curtain, turns toward my brother, uncle and me, and then just picks up one of the beers and just downs it all in one big gulp. Now this wasn’t an average size beer, this was one of the large twenty-two or twenty-four ouncers.

Then the man with one of the thickest necks and chest and thickest veins running down enormous arms slowly turns towards the three of us, belches as loud a lions roar, and says, “Hell, I don’t know. See the promoter!” We all three just started busting out laughing as he just picked up the remaining beers and headed back behind the curtain like, “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain,” and disappeared as quickly as he had downed the cup of beer. I actually got to share this story with Morocco several years later when we were on tour together in Australia. He had a big laugh as I retold the story to him and said, “Well we’ll have to have a beer together then won’t we?”

The main point here is, guys (the boys) just didn’t talk to anyone about letting them into the world of professional wrestling. Nowadays, and it seems unfortunate, mostly to the fans, that a guy can say, “Hey, you got $500, and I’ll train you to be a wrestler. I own a wrestling school.” Yeah right. Get trained by a professional! It’s just way too easy for guys to get into the wrestling business. I don’t like that. I think a guy that wants to get

into the business should, first off, obviously have a love for professional wrestling.

They should also have respect for the wrestling business. Second, they should all have respect for the veterans and the guys that went out and busted their asses night in and night out too make a living in the wrestling business. I'm in no way bragging or boasting, but I used to go to every wrestling show I could go to. But, far more important than just going to the shows, I watched the matches, and I had total respect for the guys involved in the matches.

My brother and I would even try to sneak in early to the local shows at the armory when I was about twelve or so, just to see a live show after watching wrestling on TV for years. I learned to help set up the ring by the time I was fifteen. I knew this was what I wanted to do with my life. Me and my brother would run and get coffee, hamburgers, or anything else for the guys, just to get into the shows. Then many years later I sold everything I had, packed what was left into a Chevy Chevette and drove 1,500 miles to Tampa to attend Malenko's Wrestling Camp. It was the best move I ever made. We trained four days per week, and did weekly shows.

As mentioned I had met a local wrestler from Pikeville, Kentucky, named Rick Newsome, He was a pretty good guy who tried to help me early on when I was first trying to break into the wrestling business. He did help me out early in my career prior to making this move to Tampa. He just really never smartened me up too much about wrestling being a work. Most of what I learned from him was that the finish would be decided prior to the matches that I was involved in. I had worked with him in my first match and several times thereafter. We used to "potato" the hell out of each other in those early matches. Trust me, not all potatoes come from Idaho. In wrestling, a potato is when you hit your opponent unusually hard, or harder than necessary. I didn't know any better, I just thought that was the way things were. Of course, I eventually learned different. I also learned that most of the time, most potatoes were accidents, and that wasn't the way you worked. Still, potatoes do happen, but hey it's a man's sport and accidents do happen. Rick never steered me wrong, and as I said gave me my first few matches with him. He even got me booked on some other shows prior

to making the decision that I really wanted to learn how to wrestle and work. I was working a show one night when another wrestler didn't show up, so after working Rick, I was ask to go back out and work in a tag-team match with Buddy Landel. Buddy and I were going to face Hector Guerrero, as "Laser Tron," and "Boogie Woogie" Jimmy Valiant in the main event. The promoter even paid me an extra ten dollars. Buddy, who I would eventually meet and work with again many years later in Smoky Mountain Wrestling told me to just follow his lead and to listen. It wasn't until this night, after having probably 10-15 matches that I realized that these guys knew how to work. I was watching from the ring apron, and I remember it like it was yesterday, that Buddy reached up and "pulled" Hector's mask from behind, while being held in a top wrist lock. I looked, and Buddy had barely even touched the back of the mask and Hector went straight down on his back. They tied, or locked up again, only for Hector to once again gain the advantage on Buddy in a top wrist lock, before, you guessed it, Buddy barely touched the back of the mask and once again Hector was lying on his back. I couldn't believe it. I mean, I knew at this point wrestling was a business, I just didn't know that it was, quote, a work. These guys actually worked together to put on a match. I knew right then and there, I better learn to work if I ever wanted to make it very far in the world of professional wrestling. As for the rest of the match that night, those guys just worked around me, and finally Valiant held me in the middle of the ring, with my arms behind my back, and whispered, "Catch him," in my ear. Hector then leaped from the top turnbuckle and at the last second, Jimmy let my arms go and I caught Hector as he cross bodied me and rolled me up for the pin, "1, 2, 3!" Hector said, "Thank you," as he covered me and that was that. Pin me, pay me, I want to learn to work!

Rick wished me nothing but the best of luck. He knew that I wanted to go further with my wrestling career and that I had bigger dreams than just to be working on local shows for little or no pay. That's why I think it's just way too easy for guys to "break-into" the business today. I had my first match with Rick. I'll always be thankful that he helped me out. Of course, I'll never forget that first match, potatoes and all that began my professional wrestling career.

In Tampa, The Malenkos ran a real wrestling school. There were regulars, newbies, and veterans who would drop by to train. It was an honor to be trained by the likes of the Malenkos, his sons, Joe and Dean, along with other veterans. From time to time the likes of Karl Gotch would drop by to help train the young boys. And believe me he could stretch a guy six ways till Sunday when he wanted. And with the good Professor preaching conditioning, wrestling, ground tactics, and the incredible ability to "hook" you a 1,000 different ways, it was well worth every second I spent there.

Again this was still at a time when not just anyone could walk in and be a "rassler." There was honor, respect, and it was still a special brotherhood. I'm so thankful for having Professor Boris Malenko as my wrestling coach, mentor, friend, and father figure. In Japan, the "young boys" that want to become professional wrestlers usually have to go to a reputable dojo and physically train hard day in and day out for at least two years before they even get their first match. They are taught not only to respect the veterans, but they live, eat, and sleep pro wrestling. That's the price one should pay to become good at their life's calling.

Malenko told me to, "Forget everything you think you know about being a professional wrestler, and any prior training you may have had. I'm gonna start you out at square one Bobby. Those guys up in Kentucky and West Virginia, all they want to do is kick and punch each other, and God Bless 'em, but they don't know any better and how to actually wrestle and work. They know very little about what I'm going to teach you." I was all ears, and listened to his every word. Even though I didn't know anything, at first I wanted to resist what he was telling me, especially in regards to what I thought I knew. What I actually knew was really very little. I'm glad I listened to this man that would become a great influence on me and make such an impact in my life. Little did I know at that moment that he would eventually be my mentor.

Mr. Malenko not only trained me to be a wrestler, he taught me many great life lessons. There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about him in some small way. His memory comes into my mind at some point in my day and it brings a smile to my heart. I'm thankful for the privilege of spending time with him.

Some of my resistance wasn't so much about learning to be a wrestler and how to wrestle but from the fact that I thought if you lifted weights, and got bigger, you could become a professional wrestler. The thought of getting bigger and stronger has little to do with conditioning. There's a difference between show muscles, and actual functional strength and ring conditioning. Mr. Malenko had other ideas. He took me out in the hot sun of Tampa, Florida and taught me about the importance of "conditioning." He always said that "Conditioning is your best hold." This, I later found out, was more than true. Being a newcomer into the world of professional wrestling, I needed guidance.

I personally think that any newcomer to pro wrestling or any job for that matter, hopefully should have a mentor who will help him successfully navigate through the entry experience. It's important because if you're able to establish a close, and personal mentoring relationship with one of the veterans early in your career, you will not only have more respect for the business, but you will become a better wrestler and person as a direct result of having someone mentoring you.

Again it's just way too easy for a guy to get into our business and on a card nowadays. Some 145 lb rack of bones wants to "train," if you can call it that, to get into our thing, our business and there's no respect for the veterans or the lost art of wrestling. These guys need to learn, love, respect, and dedicate themselves to the craft of the wrestling business. They come to shows with little or no professional ring gear, such as wrestling boots or trunks, and even less "proper" training.

They need to take the time to actually learn about the wrestling business. Let me rephrase that: The Professional Wrestling Business. All I can say is, make them pay, make them pay the price of sleeping in a car or four to six guys to a room, eat baloney, and for crying out loud, make them learn to shut the fuck up. They need to listen to and respect the veterans and get out there and do their job, no matter what it is, and give the fans their money's worth and be thankful they're even on the card!

I felt awkward, let alone worn out doing the strenuous workouts, or "conditioning," that Malenko was putting me through. But, from his discipline, and my dedication to his methods, our relationship developed. I

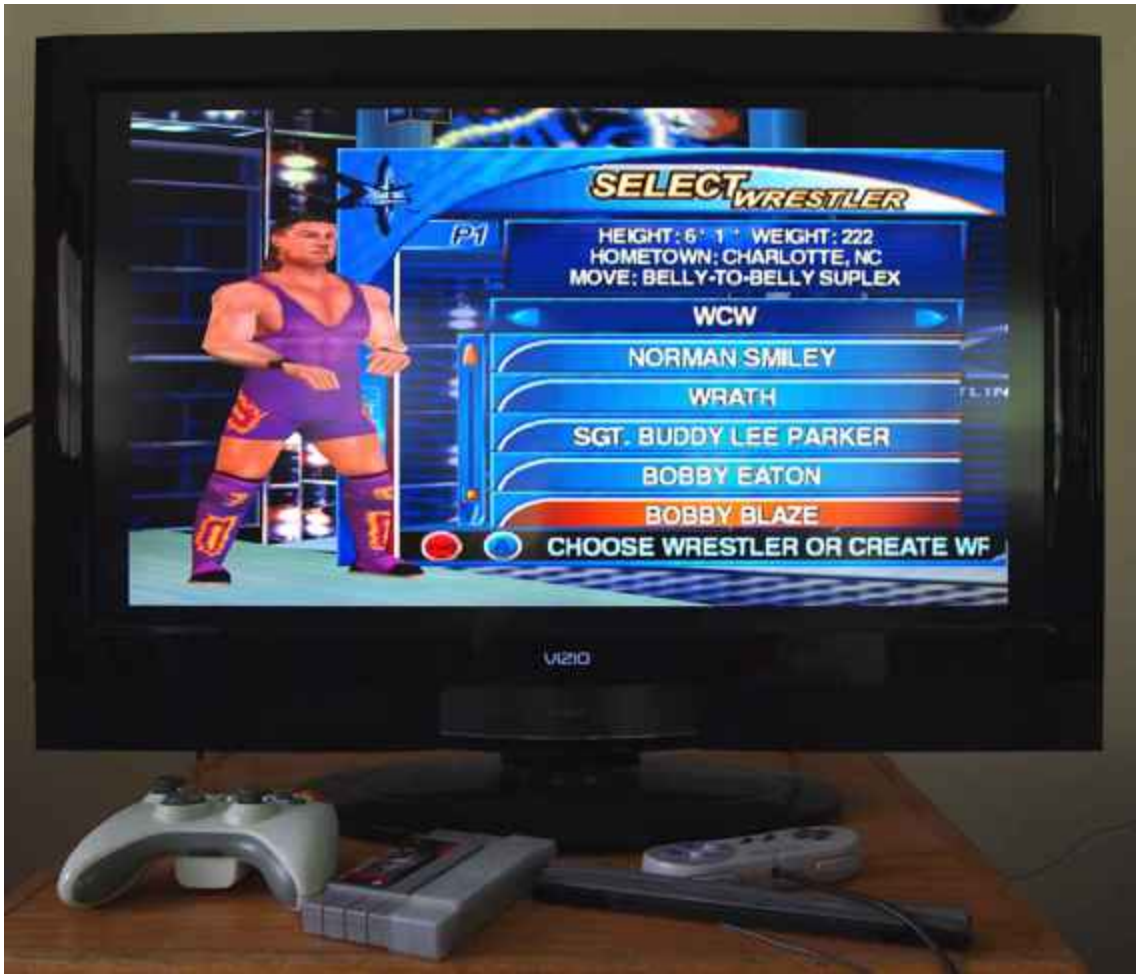
have nothing but respect for him. He trained a lot of young boys to wrestle, but more importantly he took many young boys and not only trained them for successful careers, but helped turn them into men. He became more like a father figure to many, and I was one of the ones that he was a father figure to. I got lucky enough to not only meet and train under this great man, but had the best possible wrestling training I could get.

"The eyes are the mirrors of your life Bobby" he used to always say to me. He had so many sayings or "Malenkoisms." His sayings were and are probably more legendary than him. He was a legend! I recall the day Hiro Matsuta showed up at the wrestling camp and it just blew me away. Malenko introduced me and several other students to Hiro. It was a true honor to meet him. He was also a top notch professional wrestling trainer as well. Anyway, after he left Malenko told me about a match they had in Japan, back in 1963. Hell, that was the year I was born. Here he was just telling me about this match that they had like it had just happened yesterday and how "over" their match was on that night. I just sat there in awe. Of course, impressed as I was, listening to his story, I started putting it over and how much I would have loved to have seen it when he just says, "There's nothing older than yesterday's newspaper Bobby, that was a long time ago." He may have been right, "There's nothing older than yesterday's newspaper," but I sure would have liked to have seen him work in his prime. Anyway, this match along with many other matches, I'm sure, was one that made others take notice of his "conditioning and his ring psychology." Like I said, the guy was a legend and had a career that took him "around the world five times and spoke to everyone at least once." He taught me so much and influenced my life in a way in which I try to live even today.

On exercising, "Choose something you hate doing, and do it anyway." "The best hold in wrestling is conditioning. The worst is the 'office' hold." Ah, "the office hold," now that's a hard hold to break. That's when the Booker doesn't like you and pencils you in to lose every night. Another little piece of advice Malenko gave me, was to pay close attention to the other individuals who were in the territory, and be different. "If everyone

else is yelling and screaming, you just talk. If they're all talking, you yell and scream." In other words… "Be different."

He most certainly was unique and different. He took a young boy from Kentucky under his wing, trained him, gave him an opportunity to make a living at something he loved and enjoyed doing for more than fifteen years. His advice is still just as true outside the ring as it was in it. "Life offers no one guarantees, only opportunities; I'm offering you an opportunity Bobby." I would like to dedicate this book to my mentor, Larry Simon, a poor Russian Jew who came to this country with nothing, and left it as "The Great Professor Boris Malenko," a man who became a millionaire in mentoring.



Bobby Blaze in EA Sports' "WCW Mayhem" for Nintendo 64

three

Some Brightness

“I see skies of blue... Clouds of white... Bright blessed days... Dark sacred nights... And I think to myself... What a wonderful world.” Louis Armstrong

When you first get into professional wrestling, especially if you’re a newcomer to the business please pay close attention to what I’m about to say. If you’re a veteran reading this I think you will agree that this is the way things should be. These are some of the things that have been lost from a once respectable business.

This can also apply to any occupation that you choose. You have to learn, and not only learn, but strive to be the best at whatever your chosen profession or occupation may be. In the wrestling business, since I had Malenko as a trainer, I was fortunate enough to travel the world and actually learn to wrestle. I then learned to make money, but it wasn’t always about the money to me, because I truly loved wrestling. One day I think I’ll open my own wrestling school. I’ll first start by charging a small fee of five dollars to get in the school and into the business. Then I’ll charge fifty thousand dollars to help you get out, because once you get into the wrestling business, it’s in your blood, and you can never actually get out. But instead of that, I’m going to save you five dollars and even throw in a nickel’s worth of advice free of charge.

First, if you don’t like my views or don’t like hearing the truth then piss off and go read something else. Otherwise, you already bought the book, so you might as well keep reading it. If you don’t like what I’m saying, then ask another true veteran and don’t just hear, but listen to what he has to say. If you don’t like what anyone else who has ever done anything successful in the wrestling business has to say, then you’re either an idiot or you shouldn’t be in the wrestling business to begin with. I could be wrong, but I doubt it. True veterans know our business! Greenhorns, punks, pukes, or know-it-alls listen up. Find a good trainer who knows the

wrestling business and actually knows how to wrestle. Preferably, try to find one with a good reputation in the wrestling business. I have no reason to brag. I just tell it like it is, because I lived it. I have been there, done that, had the tee-shirts printed, and sold them.

I have seen both sides of pro wrestling: from the outside looking in, and from the inside looking out. Look in the mirror and see if you truly are meant to be in professional wrestling. If you run your mouth, or think you're tough, think again, and be gone. You have no idea about what it takes to be in the ring professionally. I know! If you get into the world of professional wrestling and eventually get booked on a show, then be thankful, if that is one of your life's dreams. So when you go to the show, go to the locker room area, and the first thing you do is you go in and you shake everyone's hand in that room and you introduce yourself to each and every one of them.

I don't care if you just saw them on last night's show or you've known them for years, you show respect and shake their hand like a man. You introduce yourself and tell them your name. After that, sit down, shut your fucking mouth, and listen. Don't say a word unless spoken to. Most of these guys have driven thousands and thousands of miles to help pave the way for a guy like you to even be in this business.

Many have had matches night after night and lots of times wrestled twice on Sundays to make a living in this business. I wanted to learn to wrestle, but I was a fighter, not a wrestler. I needed professional training. Once I got in the wrestling business, I soon learned that the last thing others, especially the veterans need to hear is how you "trained" under some jack-off they never heard of. They don't care about how many moonsaults you can do, and how you wrestle one time a month for your "promoter" buddy who pays you in leftover hotdogs, stale popcorn, and flat soda pop, and how great you are. If you think that you're a professional wrestler, trust me, you're not! Second, while sitting there, listen. Listen to what "the boys" are talking about and how passionate they are about their job. Speaking of jobs, if you get up in the morning and go teach school, or you're a plumber, or a garbage man, guess what, you have a job. And, there's no disrespect to any of the jobs I mentioned. Wrestling was my job!

If you ever get booked on a show, then you have a job. Some nights your job may be to go out to the ring and get the snot beat out of you and get pinned in less time than it took you to get dressed. If you do it right, then you did your job for that night. Take pride in that and listen and learn. Maybe you're the curtain jerker, a name some used for the guys in the opening match. If that's your job for the show or on a tour, then you go out there and give those people their money's worth and be the best opening match, they've ever seen. Someone has to go out first and get the fans fired up. You're setting the tempo for the rest of the show. If you get beat, don't worry about it, there's nothing wrong with taking a pin or going to a draw while opening the show. It's your job, do it! Work for those fans, and keep working your way up the card. If you ever make it to the semi-main or main event and have proven yourself worthy and proven over time that you are dependable, talented enough, and willing to work for your program, or work for the match and not your ego, and have paid your dues, then maybe one day you will not only be a "rassler," but a professional wrestler. If you show enough respect, listen, learn, train hard, take the time to listen and learn from a veteran, then maybe one day you'll not only be a professional wrestler, you may have also in the process become a good "worker" and even earn some respect from the "boys in the back."

interviews and promos

Interviews and promos are two different animals. An interview is exactly that, an interview between the announcer and the wrestler, and again an important part of the televised wrestling show. A promo however is when the wrestler lays out exactly the who, what, where, and when this great mat action is going to take place. Believe it or not the professional wrestler that you were listening to used to do his own talking or had an evil manager who did the talking for him, unlike today's television product where they have soap opera writers, and other writers scripting out the wrestlers' promos that usually suck as most are completely irrelevant to the real person. The performer or "character" should be more like the character he is portraying. These pre-written speeches don't come across as well as when the wrestler of yesteryear lived his gimmick, and gave his own interviews or shot his own promos. This is because most were characters

unto themselves. To me this is bullshit. In the good old days when wrestling was wrestling, when it was “Wrestling the way you like it, and Wrestling the way you remember it,” a guy would come out and cut a promo either during the TV program or before or after his match. The guys of yesteryear didn’t need to rehearse for or go over their lines for a promo. They knew what they were talking about because they weren’t acting or playing wrestler. They were being themselves, real. They were that character. This isn’t to say they didn’t go over in their head what they had in mind to say, or weren’t prepared when they cut a promo, but they certainly didn’t need some soap opera writer feeding them their lines. Also, not every wrestler had to do a promo. They would come out and tell you who they would face as their opponent. They would tell you, the fan, what type of match they were challenging their opponent to accept. Or, they would let it be known as to what type of match they were accepting. Somewhere in their interview or promo they would tell you in which town or building along with the day and date that this match was going to take place. Quite simple.

Good promo guys are hard to find now, but back in the day, and I don’t want to leave anyone off this list, but there were men that could cut promos and “get heat” through their dialogue.

Here’s my brief list of a few great ones in no particular order: The Great Malenko could cut a great promo. He would take his time and explain exactly what he was going to do to his rival once they stepped inside of that squared circle. Terry Funk! Funk, to me always had the greatest promos. Look up and listen to some of his promos on YouTube sometime, it will be well worth your while. Funk, like Malenko, would take his time, but he also had excitement in his voice, and a way of using simple body language. Beneath all of his sweat, blood, and maybe a few curse words, no big f-bombs, but just a curse word here or there about kicking ass, or as in his classic promo in SMW where he called “Bullet” Bob Armstrong’s sons bastards, there lurked something else in his promo.

That something else that Funk had when he cut those promos was an expression of how men talked to other men. This is especially true when one man is calling another man out for a fight, or in this case a wrestling match. He made the interview so believable that you wanted to go see him

beat someone's ass or have his kicked. The other important part of these "old school" interviews was when a guy said he was going to do something to his opponent. Back when wrestling was wrestling, not fucking sports entertainment, if the guy cutting the promo said that he was going to do something to his opponent that night, you can damn well better believe that he was going to do it somewhere during the match.

Believability! If they said they were going to "pile drive a man's head through the mat," then usually somewhere in that match, that pile driver was executed and usually with devastating effects. This brings me to another man that did great interviews and promos, and that was Jake "The Snake" Roberts. Most times Jake didn't scream or go on some useless rant. No, he would again, take his time, use his body language, assess the current situation or his rival, and then deliver a speech that made you believe that when he did use the "DDT," it actually meant something during his match. Like the pile driver, at one time the DDT was one of the most effective ways to pull a man's head back and slam that head straight down into the mat, and sometimes on the concrete arena floor. Like Funk's or Jerry "The King" Lawler's pile driver, the DDT, especially when delivered by one of these three legends the move truly made you believe that their adversary just had their neck snapped or at the very least, had their head jammed and crammed so far back into their ass, they could see what remained of their breakfast from that morning. Malenko, Funk, and Jake, and I know of many more that were all great promo guys. I'm not saying that there aren't any good talkers in the business today, there's just a lack of promo guys in the current state of the wrestling business.

One last example would be "Bullet" Bob Armstrong. He would tell you exactly who he was fighting, and where and when he was fighting him. Bob had a great body and was a hell of a worker. He knew, as did many others I have mentioned, how to book matches, promote fantastic shows, and knew how to "get over" with the fans. Others I'll mention briefly are Kevin Sullivan, Jesse "The Body" Ventura, Hulk Hogan, and of course The greatest NWA Champion ever, Ric Flair. Flair was the man, and as you all know, his interviews were priceless, especially with the, "To be the man, you have to beat the man! Whoooooo!" Flair may have been in my humble opinion the complete package.

To me, there are many ingredients to the making of a great professional wrestler but most have the main three ingredients and they are: being able to work-wrestle, having a good body, and being a good talker. As in making a great cake, usually the main three ingredients are flour, milk, eggs, or sugar, but usually any of these are the first three of the main ingredients. The same holds true to be a great wrestler or more specifically a great worker. If a guy can work, has a good body, and can talk then he has the main things that would make him a champion or at least, he would always hold a job in the professional wrestling business.

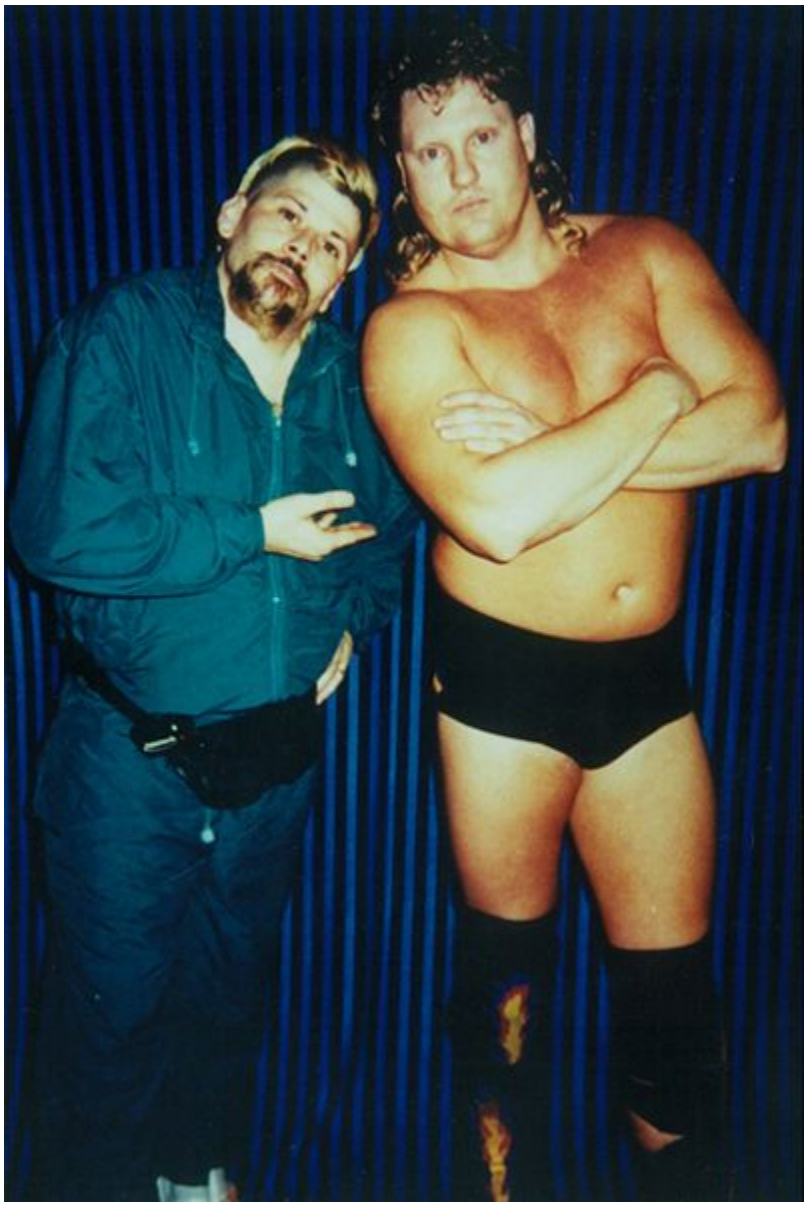
Now take a second to think about that and come up with your own list. Here's a brief list of mine: Flair, in his prime, had a great body, could work, and he could always talk. Look at Hogan, great body, great talker, above average worker, if you ever saw him work in Japan or when he actually had to work, he could. Funk, good body, great talker, even greater worker.

These are just a few examples. Now think of a few that had at least two of the three like "The American Dream" Dusty Rhodes. He had a decent body at one time, but he could always work and man "The Dream" could always talk. Next, think about "The Road Warriors," great bodies, good workers when they wanted to be, and they had "Precious" Paul Ellering there to talk for them, great combination.

This brings me back to the original thought about cutting promos and giving interviews, only this time I'll mention managers. Jimmy "The Mouth of the South" Hart, "Classy" Freddie Blassie, Bobby "The Brain" Heenan, and JJ Dillon. JJ was a tremendous worker in his day, but many will remember him more so for managing, The Four Horsemen. He was always upfront and honest with me in our dealings. I had a lot of respect for him during my time in WCW where he had other duties and responsibilities besides being a manager.

The other manager I'll mention is one you may or may not know, "Classy" Roy Bass. When someone talks about getting heat with a crowd, Bass could get more heat on a card then anyone at any given time. The thing I liked about Roy Bass was he was the same person inside of the ring as he was outside of it. He just flat out hated people and people hated him. I can't count the number of restaurants that we were asked to leave due to his

crazy personality. I really wish Bass had been seen on a national level as I think he would have made lots and lots of money for a big company but he just couldn't catch the right break.



Classy Roy Bass & Bobby Blaze

Jimmy Hart may be the very best when it comes to doing great promos and helping his guys get over. He also knew his job of making fans really hate him. He got involved physically in matches and was willing to do whatever it took and say whatever he had to say to make the fans despise him and his antics. Jimmy Hart was good to me when I worked for WCW.

There was always professional respect between Jimmy Hart and myself. Many times he really went out of his way to keep me informed as to what was going on behind the scenes and he was actually trying to help the guys that could work. He was all about quality matches and instrumental in helping guys like me to keep their jobs in the company prior to the demise and eventual downfall of WCW. Thanks Jimmy. You're one hell of a talent, and a true professional.

Last but not least and one of my all time favorites was James E. Cornette, not only because I worked with and for him and learned from him, but for other reasons such as loving his work in the old Memphis Territory. I also enjoyed how involved he got in the battles between The Midnight Express and The Rock-n-Roll Express, in the old NWA. He would actually get involved physically, like Hart had during that time, as well as when he was over SMW. His confrontations with "The Commissioner," Bob Armstrong, also at times became physical. He had passion when he spoke that came from having one of the greatest minds in the business. He knew how to make good matches or a good matchup even better with his ideas. He also knew how to turn something that could be a bad situation around, often at his own expense, to make sure that the fans got their money's worth. He could interject himself into a great moment on the card through quick thinking. Once such example that comes to mind was when Abdullah The Butcher was scheduled to appear on a few SMW shows, but a more lucrative deal came up for him to tour Japan, where Abdullah was over big time, plus I'm sure it was a longer scheduled tour, so he went to Japan instead.

The fans who expected to see The Butcher were pissed off to say the least when Cornette came out and personally announced that he was sorry that Abdullah wasn't going to be there. Cornette, full of confidence and arrogance, also let it be known to the fans that he had gone out and found a man that would surely put "Bullet" Bob Armstrong out of commission once and for all in the main event. The fans were still not pleased with Cornette, as he went on speaking about his mystery man. He told them about how this extraordinary person was a former NWA Tag-Team Champion and had been a big star in the WWF. Cornette said, "This man is my 'ace-in-the-hole,' so to say, because my man has even wrestled in WrestleMania." The card went

as planned as I don’t think one person asked for their money back in that packed house in Paintsville, Kentucky, that night. As “Bad to the Bone” blasted through the loud speakers and “The Bullet” made his way to the ring. Then, out comes “Cowboy” Bob Orton, Jr. Of course people booed and screamed obscenities, as I’m sure they thought they were being ripped off even though they had been warned. I’ll cut to the match, because, within two minutes of the start the fans were standing, watching, listening, and amazed at how Orton was in the ring and he meant business in the way he handled and carried himself in his efforts to rid SMW of Cornette’s arch nemesis, Armstrong, once and for all. That night, these two men put on a show that just blew the roof off the building. All the boys were watching from their respective locker room areas, the fans had forgotten who was originally scheduled for this action packed main event. Cornette used all his usual dirty tricks from ringside in trying to assist Orton. Bullet, kept his cool in-ring demeanor, using his more scientific wrestling skills to try to out wrestle Orton, who can truly wrestle and had a well respected work rate in the ring, even though he usually liked to be wild and use a more roughhouse approach. He used the latter to beat down Armstrong throughout the match and those fans, along with the boys that night, got to witness what had been promised, an interesting, entertaining, and exciting wrestling match. The Bullet won and as advertised, the “loser was to kiss the winners feet” after the match.

Of course, Orton, being the typical, heel, had no true loyalty to Cornette, as he made his way back to the dressing room, saying he wanted no part of this as Cornette was now on his own. Cornette, being the professional that he was, was begging off and doing his best to completely avoid having to kiss the boots of the winner. But the Bullet grabbed the house mic and demanded that Cornette kiss his boots or be fired from SMW, as he was still the acting commissioner and had the power to bar him from future shows as well as fine him. Cornette dropped to his knees and begged, but finally bent over and kissed the boot of The Bullet. The fans went nuts, but then as Cornette tried to crawl and scurry his way out of the ring Bullet spoke again, saying, “The contract said that the loser must ‘kiss the feet’ of the winner, and I have one more boot. Now kiss it.” Boom, another big pop from the crowd as Jimmy begged and pleaded in protest. Then as Bullet put his other foot out to be kissed. Corny bent to kiss it and

everyone in the building popped even louder. What a great performance from all three men. But this was just another example as to how Jimmy Cornette would do whatever it took to do his job as a manager and give the fans every hard earned dollar they had spent on the show. He didn't mind putting himself out, as he knew his job and duties, and knew how to please the great fans of SMW. He interjected himself even though this may have seemed an embarrassing situation, but it was for the show, and what was best for the company. What a great mind for the business. James E. Cornette was good to me, and many could learn from him if they would take the time to listen to what he has to say. He treats his promos and interviews like they are a complete shoot, and that's what makes them believable.

the territories

When I first started wrestling, I would take a match just about any place and for just about any amount of money the promoter would pay me. It's all a part of paying your dues to get into and to be a part of the business. Back when I broke in, the business wasn't referred to as "sports entertainment." The marquees still said wrestling. There were many places around the US that still ran wrestling shows. The business was changing, but there were opportunities for young wrestlers to find work and maybe make a few dollars.

One day when I was training in Tampa at Malenko's I got to meet a man by the name of Karl Gotch. Karl Gotch was known as "The God of Wrestling" in Japan. As Karl spoke, the boys listened to his wisdom. I know that there are many guys that hated Karl because of his opinions. I'm fine with that fact, but because he treated me well I had nothing but respect for him. I think he treated me with respect because I was one of "Larry's boys." It's also a known fact that Karl was a legit tough guy that could wrestle, shoot, hook, and knew so many submission holds that he could and would be a real bastard in the ring.

Many times he would just "eat a guy alive" before giving him any comeback or taking a pin. In this regard, I can certainly understand why

some guys didn't enjoy working with him back in the day. But, if Gotch respected you, and your ring work, he could and often did have solid and good "worked" matches. He was a wise man and I for one enjoyed most of his stories and always tried to learn something different from him when he stopped by to help at Malenko's gym.

He said that the only place to wrestle nowadays was over in Japan unless you had a contract with either WCW or WWF. "There used to be thirty-eight territories in the United States, and I ought to know because I got fired from every one of them." Of course when there were territories, that meant there were more opportunities for young boys to get a break and to work their way up the card, or to just gain enough experience to wrestle in the next territory for a better spot on the card, or at least more money. For a veteran of course this meant that he could pretty much pack his bags and head to a different territory and still maintain a job as a professional wrestler.

I started my wrestling career working on small independent shows and then worked in what used to be known as territories. Professional wrestling territories are dead. I know this first hand because I was one of the fortunate wrestlers that actually had the privilege to wrestle when there were a few small areas around the country that still had full-time, weekly or monthly wrestling shows.

After that first match on September 11, 1988, I got lost out there on the road somewhere. I don't regret the decision to become a professional wrestler. Like the song by Alice Cooper, "From the Inside," says

I got lost on the road somewhere.
Was it Texas or was it Canada?
Drinking whiskey in the morning light,
I worked the stage all night long,
At first we laughed about it,
My long haired drunken friends.
Proposed a toast to Jimmy's ghost.
I never dreamed that I would wind up on the losing end.

I'm stuck here on the inside looking out.

I'm just another case.
Where's my makeup, where's my face? On the inside.

You all got your kicks from what you saw up there.
Eight bucks even buys a folding chair.
I was downing Seagrams on another flight,
and I worked that stage all night long.
You were screaming for the villain up there,
And I was much obliged.
The old road sure screwed me good this time.
It's hard to see where the vicious circle ends.

I'm stuck here on the inside looking out.
That's no big disgrace.
Where's my makeup, where's my face? On the inside.

I had started my journey to travel the world and to try to become a millionaire. I told myself I'd be a millionaire, "ah," you may say, "it's all about the money." Well, not to me it wasn't. Nope! I told myself I wanted to wrestle in enough matches to wrestle in front of over a million people. On this date, I began that journey. I would be a millionaire in friends as I entertained them in some form or another throughout my wrestling career.

I stopped counting after about a thousand matches because I was at a thousand after only a couple of years. From wrestling in half-full high school gyms to sold out and standing room only arenas, from local televised events to pay-per-views and the power of Satellite TV, WTBS, TNT and international events from England to Japan, I lost track. That's why I say that I didn't mind getting lost out there on the road somewhere. Somewhere out there on the road I figured that I'd surpassed my goal of being a millionaire. Actually I have thought about the "what if?" The "what if" I had set this goal to be a millionaire in dollars instead of fans, then what? Would I be any happier or thankful? No! The money would have been spent one way or another. The memories of most of those matches, the people I met, and the places and things I saw will last a lifetime. You can't put a dollar amount on the type of life I led, and the memories that I forever hold in my mind and heart.

Sometimes I'd reel myself back from the road and get into an odd job, such as substitute teaching or by becoming a certified personal trainer here or there but for the most part once I started traveling as a professional wrestler I never really stopped. I did have a few good jobs in between bookings, but after July 4th, 1991, I never looked back. I was Bobby Blaze, and I was gonna, "Set the Wrestling World on Fire!" When I say I got lost out there it's because somewhere between long car rides, both alone, and at other times with five or six guys crammed into a vehicle, and bus trips, on flights, and between flights, I just kept going. Like I said, I never looked back, I just kept going and at times I really just lost myself because I saw the world fast and days became weeks, and weeks became months, and months became years that flashed before me quicker than a shooting star seen on the return trip home from whatever time zone or twilight zone I just returned from, having match after match or tour after tour.

As I look back on all the travel and to all the matches I had on those trips I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. Even as tough as it was to leave my family, or friends that I met working in a certain area for a while, I survived. Even when the business was tough, and as tough as the business was and is, I feel lucky to have survived those days because I was having so much fun in the ring. I just kept going even on my worst days. Robert Gibson, from the Rock-n-Roll Express told me one time, "Bobby even when this business is bad, it's good. And when it's good, well, it's great!" That is so true. I took this to heart because even when it was bad, it was still good, good to just be in the business.

Now at this point let me just say, whether you want to believe the stuff that happened to me or you want to believe that some of my stories are exaggerated or made up is completely up to you. I could be pulling your leg, or maybe pissing on your leg and try to convince you that it's just raining.

I can assure you that what I'm writing and telling you about is true, but you be the judge. I thank you for buying the book, and I hope you have enjoyed it thus far, but it's not the Holy fucking Bible you're reading, so believe what you want. I just want you to enjoy the book while learning about my journey through my years of traveling as a professional wrestler.

One of my earliest goals in wrestling included being good enough to travel to and wrestle in Japan. The strong style of wrestling and the respect for the sport of wrestling in Japan was to my liking. I knew that if I could one day wrestle there, I could wrestle anywhere. Another goal that I had early on was to one day wrestle on WTBS, The Super Station, out of Atlanta, Georgia, on a Saturday night. Win, lose, or draw, I wanted to be on the show that used to air, Georgia Championship Wrestling, which was also a part of the old NWA. When I was growing up The National Wrestling Alliance was, in my eyes, the best wrestling in the world. Of course I wanted to wrestle on The Super Station. Also, the main cornerstone of my earliest wrestling memories was when the old Memphis territory shows would air on early Saturday mornings and the guys that I got to watch and enjoy each week were second to none with the old-school style wrestling, the talent, the brutality, and it was basically what I was brought up on prior to ICW wrestling and then eventually the shows from Georgia Championship wrestling began to air years later. Nonetheless, I loved all the wrestling programming that I got to enjoy as a boy growing up.

I always felt like they had the best wrestlers, the best matches and the best champions in the world. I accomplished both goals and a few others along the way in my career. I had no idea that I would ever be able to be on TBS or get to travel to Japan on seven different tours, but that would be a long way off and take several years of hard work before my dreams would be realized, after my initial training at Malenko's.

I think I mentioned that this book is more about working-wrestling in territories versus being involved with the WWF/WWE or WCW, both of which I worked for at one time or another. I did a few "jobs" for the old WWF back in 1991 and 1992 on their Super Stars of Wrestling program. I also had a lucrative contract deal with Turner Sports/WCW from 1997-2000.

I even got to be on an EA Sports wrestling video game while I was working for WCW and it was a unique experience to help and be a part of EA Sports first venture into producing a professional wrestling video game. I enjoyed the exhausting days of being involved in motion capture. I had the

chance to perform all these great moves and wrestling combinations. It was a thrill knowing that if nothing else, all these moves that I performed were being digitally recorded and mapped out and that I would at least then be remembered for being a ring character forever, well at least in a video game. Yes, I, or at least my wrestling persona, Bobby Blaze, would be immortalized as a cartoon character in a video game forever.

where are you on the card

I've seen guys setting up the ring, done it myself, seen guys helping guys carrying gear in, not out of being a punk, but out of respect. I've seen guys prior to shows get in the ring and get stretched, had it done many times, but only to learn to protect myself and to better myself as a wrestler and worker. This game ain't for boys! This is a man's sport! If you want to teach school, you don't walk into a classroom and start telling kids about algebra when they're in kindergarten, you go to college first to learn for yourself, then you have an idea about a lesson plan or game plan for when you do begin teaching.

You don't just walk into a restroom with a plunger and say, "There's the problem, a lump of shit is stopping up the toilet." No, you do an apprenticeship under someone who knows a thing or two about being a plumber.

I'm not making light of these fine professions, merely making a point that we all start somewhere and we have to learn. And, we can learn from the best, the locker room veterans, who have been there, done that, got the tee-shirt, got the hat, kicked ass, and learned to take pride in something. They, the veterans, put forth enough effort to become the best professional wrestlers that they could be. They did it with pride, dignity, and respect for the ones that came along before them.

They learned, they watched, they listened, and they worked their asses off for that top spot on the card. Because they earned it, they deserved it, and they became well respected workers, not just wanna-be "rasslers."

So, now, take pride in what you do, be thankful, shake hands, respect a veteran, and maybe, just maybe, you'll get booked on more than one card a month and maybe one day you too will become a worker, and not just some guy who doesn't even own wrestling gear who climbs in the ring one weekend a month or year and receives that cold hotdog, stale popcorn, and flat soda pop payoff to say you're a "rassler."

Good-luck! I wish you well. Much respect and love goes out to the likes of the late great Professor Boris Malenko, his sons, Joe and Dean, promoters and bookers like Jim Cornette, who gave me an opportunity and one of my first breaks in the US, and to too many guys to mention that I traveled with and worked with who took the time to help me along the way. Also, max respect to the veterans of the business who helped develop me and left me with the passion and respect for something I truly love: professional wrestling!

Every match on a professional wrestling card has its very own importance. For example, if you're in the opening match, your job is to get the crowd ready by setting the tone for the rest of the show or event. You have to go out there and make the fans believe that, tonight, if that first match was that good, then the rest of the show, and especially the main event is going to be well worth the price of admission.

The first couple of matches set the tone. No matter who you are, if you're in one of those first couple of matches, you go out to the ring and do what the booker tells you do. If that means your job for the night is to put over the other guy, you do it. You know your role and you accept it, and you do it, performing at your very best. You play the role that you are given. It's not you getting beat, it's just a character or a role, it's a work, it's your work, you do your job, just like everybody else does their job. You do what is expected of you.

By the way, if you're a rookie, and maybe even have a bunch of matches under your belt, you should respect the fact you're even on the show, so you don't question, or whine, or piss and moan. You do your job! There's a difference between doing your job and doing a job! It's really a simple business.

Once you have proven yourself, maybe paid your dues, worked your tail off for the office, and you're getting over as a face, or getting heat as a heel, then you move up the card. So now, you're involved in an actual program, and maybe you're working the third match on a card or show. This is a great spot to be in. You have time to watch the first few matches, see what is or isn't getting over with the crowd for that evening, and once again, you go out and do your job. Another good reason to be in this spot is because, one, it's right before intermission, and if you're a baby face, especially fresh off a win, or even a screw job finish in which you got beat, people will remember you as you head to the gimmick table to sell pictures, tee-shirts and such as well as sign autographs for the fans. Reason number two is, after the gimmick wars of intermission, you can usually drink a cold beer. Your night is usually over at this point unless you have a run-in later in the card, so you now have time to relax, shower, and have a cold one. One last important reason to be in this match is because it's a pretty safe place to be on the card. You're no longer opening the show, you're moving up the card, but, the gate or money is riding on the guys in the main event. It's up to everyone to work, and work hard to make the show a success, and put asses in seats, but the main event is just that, the main event, and that's what the people came to see. If the programs and show are run right, people will appreciate every match, but they came expecting to see the main event. If booked properly, the main event draws the money.

With that behind you, you may have now moved up to the fourth match or you're working in the semi-main event, which is another good spot to be in. You are now more responsible for really getting the fans ready for the main event. You are also in a spot where you could be working in the main event soon, so whatever you do, get over, make the people believe in you more than ever. People came to see the main event, and that's where you want to be, so the semi-main has to be really exciting, and has to have the fans on the edge of their seats for the main event. As said, this is the money spot. This match is the one that sells the tickets.

If you reach main event status, then you have the responsibility to draw. Your ability, your charisma, your ring work, your look, your talk, the entire package, the men involved, the angle all have to be in place to draw the gate. If you draw big crowds then you're doing your job. If you're not

drawing money, then the office has to look at bringing someone else in, or moving someone else up who can draw.

Professional wrestling has a lot of egos, and many don't want to give up their spot, and that's the way it should be, especially if they have worked their way up the card to reach it. But, they also have to realize, they sometimes have to leave their ego at the door and do what is right to draw money for the company, so the territory or company doesn't shut down. If your job is to be the champ, then be the champ. People want to, and need to, believe in the champ. Many guys want to be in the main event, but only a few will ever work their way into a main event match.

Now, keep in mind, I'm talking about a real professional wrestling organization that runs weekly or monthly shows. I'm not talking about some small-time outfit where if you're friends with someone who decides to run a show and uses a bunch of nobodies, and lets you play champ or work their main event. I'm talking about shows where there's a booker, agents, talent, and there's actually an office that truly runs professional shows.

Just remember, it's all a work. Do your job no matter where you're placed on a show. People work hard for their money and when they spend it to see a live professional wrestling show they deserve your very best effort. Give them their money's worth. This business is a work! Know your role! Do your damn job, and at the end of the night, be glad you got booked, accept your pay, and move on to the next booking.

space invader

Professional wrestling to me is easy to explain and understand. It's man versus man. If the card or program is booked correctly, one man wins, and one man loses. And, again if done right, you will want to watch it again to see who wins the next match or you will want to return to the next show to see a bunch of talented men roll around a ring in tights.

One of the easiest ways to describe pro wrestling is with an analogy that's quite simple. There you are sitting in your double wide mobile home

in rural Alabama, right after that horrendous tornado hits, the first precious item you have to get fixed is not only your television, but you've got to get that damned satellite dish lined back out so you don't miss this week's wrestling matches. That jacked up '78 Trans Am will still be there on those blocks in the morning. You've got to tune in to your favorite program by-god, come hell or high water, that tornado didn't mean a thing to you so long as you get to tune in to Saturday night wrestling.

Well, as many know, for some odd reason UFO's have a tendency to always visit some trailer park in Alabama, Georgia, or Kentucky and on one such occasion, the space invaders didn't say, "Take us to your leaders," or "We're here to probe your ass via a cavity check," but instead said, "We are here to learn about what you earthlings call sports, and more specifically professional wrestling. We want to know about this sport in the purest of forms."

Having welcomed the said alien life form into your castle de trailer and after a few cold ones, you question the intelligence of your new friend. He then explains how on his planet they basically only study long mathematical equations, watch re-runs of "The Twilight Zone" and laugh their asses off at the faces we make while having sexual intercourse. However, they are not so certain about athletics and the competitiveness of our sports, especially professional wrestling. Now as exciting as this may seem to any red blooded American, especially a Southerner, we know, we have got to tell them about the king of all sports, pro wrestling. Rasslin'!

So on with the show. We go inside and turn on the television. I would first tune in to a football game and have Mr. UFO man observe several plays or a series of downs for a few minutes. Of course he would have several questions about why there are so many players out there on the field, and why do they all want that oblong shaped object. "By the way," he may ask, "How come it's called football and no one is really using their feet, except to run?" I would then have to explain several of the rules as well as how there is football in other countries, but it's called soccer and they actually use their feet to kick the ball.

Next channel has America's game of the past time, baseball. Okay, so why does one guy have a bat, what's a glove, why is it nine against one?

The questions would run deep as I would once again have to explain the sport of baseball to him. “You’re out!” I’d scream at the TV and to the game of baseball, you’re out as America’s game as you have been replaced by football. So having covered how at one time, MLB used to be our number one watched spectator sport, it has in recent years been replaced by the NFL.

Although hockey, soccer, as mentioned, and several other sports could be revealed to the space invader, I talk to him about athletics that usually involve running, swimming, or even fighting for competition. I could explain as I flipped through the channels that there’s a great American swimmer by the name of Michael Phelps and that swimming was one way in which we survived but typically Phelps only gets to actually compete on a grander scale, such as the Olympics every four years. The same could be said about running if I showed him a track meet in which the world’s fastest human, Usain Bolt, is outrunning every other human being on the planet, I’d have to explain that he is really not running out of fear or for survival, and although it is competitive, he is actually only running against a stop watch, because no one is even close to catching him.

So, we turn the channel to WTBS, The Super Station out of Atlanta, Georgia, for a little show called, “Georgia Championship Wrestling” and lo and behold, there’s wrestling. There is sport in the purest and simplest of forms. Man versus man. The space invader can watch for less time than it takes to finish a cold beer and understand exactly what is going on.

He can see that it’s good against evil. He can see there’s one bad guy and one good guy and they are in a “ring,” or “squared circle” and inevitably, good will triumph over evil in the end. By the end of the program, he will want to tune in next week to see what happens again when these two men will fight it out once again in a rematch.

Folks, that’s about as simple as professional wrestling is to understand. It’s a man against another man, and there’s good going head to head against bad, and in the end, all the fans walk away happy as the good guy (baby face) beats the bad guy (heel) in the middle of the ring. We (wrestlers) all are just telling a story in the ring. We each tell the story a little differently in how we work or perform, but the bottom line is if a space invader came

down in his fancy flying machine, he could and would understand wrestling without anyone having to explain the rules of the engagement to him. It's pretty much sport in the purest and simplest of terms. Anyone remember the long forgotten tag-team matches? What the hell happened to tag team wrestling? Anyway, even if it were a tag-team match on the television, it would still be pretty self explanatory.

An added bonus to actually watching these great matches would be if you could hear some of the greatest voices of all-time calling the matches as you watched the program with your lil green man. Great voices like that of Bob Caudle, Tony Schiavone, and in my humble opinion the even greater voices of Lance Russell, Gordon Solie, or "good ol' JR," Jim Ross. At one point, Jim Ross left the WWF briefly and joined Bob Caudle on the SMW telecasts. Les Thatcher was also another great voice that I had the pleasure of working with during my days in SMW. It really helps a televised match to have a good commentator or color man to help move the action along. Live events, "house shows," that aren't being filmed for TV, need people with great voices and inside wrestling knowledge as ring announcers to make for a professional show. Even if the announcer just calls out the time, it makes the ring action move along as it keeps the fans informed, and hopefully, these fans will be on the edge of their seats during the match, and will go home with the desire to buy a ticket for next week's show.

Making a name on first tour here!

by Mary Bond

In his first official Canadian tour 'Blazing' Bobby Blaze has made his presence known on the Maritime Championship wrestling circuit. Currently setting the wrestling world on fire, Blaze has been busy initiating sparks to fuel the on going Maritime/USA feud that still lingers on the MCW circuit.

Originally for Ashland, Kentucky, Blaze made his commitment to the world of wrestling back in March of 1988. Quenching a career thirst that had surfaced during his early teens, Blaze turned to the guidance and direction of Professor Boris Malenko to teach him the ropes at his school in Tampa, Florida. In Malenko, Blaze found the proper instruction and training that he was seeking to prepare him for his professional career. Blaze credits Malenko as being, "the best instructor I could ever have. The best trainer and teacher in live as well as wrestling."

To date, his career has taken him extensively throughout Kentucky, West Virginia, Ohio, Indianna, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Florida. He has come to the Maritimes to compete and gain more experience in the wrestling field. His future aspirations include training more in preparation for a possible tour of Japan and Puerto Rico. With youth and athletic ability on his side there is no telling how far this 'firery' young man will go. However first on his list of priorities is to succesafully complete his Maritime tour.

As he found out the first night he wrestled here, competition in the Maritimes is especially tough right now. He admits that after facing the 7'1 Acadian Giant in his first Maritime Match, he knew right then that his work was cut out for him. However with support of Rico Fredrico ringside and Maritime Champion 'Rotten' Ron Starr, Blaze was awarded the match, ending the Giant's winning steak in the Annapolis Valley area.

Although he acknowledges that the competition here is tough, still, he feels , "some of these 'good guys' up here, I don't thing are so good. I think I can take most of them myself."

As the saying goes wherever there is smoke, there is fire, perhaps this explains why whatever there is interference there is Blaze. He claims his unexpected appearances ringside are highly intended to look after the interests of Team USA. He explains, "Being Team USA we're going to do whatever it takes to be number one. If that means interfering with each others matches, so be it, because we have to look out for each other."

His tactics sometimes questionable, Blaze usually returns to the dressing room victorious. With just three weeks of his Maritime tour under his belt, he has quickly become recognized as a rough and tough competitor. Not winning any popularity contests with fans at ringside, Blaze continues to compete, giving his best night after night in the ring.

It is the thrill of competition that sparked his interest in pursuing a career in wrestling. He enjoys the lifestyle, traveling, and the athletics involved in it. He has found that wrestling fulfills his desire to be different, and it has proven to be everything he has expected more , He says, "I knew you had to put a lot of time in on the road. I knew you had to train hard and I know it takes discipline and dedication but that's why I'm in it." He adds, "I can rise to the challenge of the discipline and dedication that it takes."

He realizes that you never know what is going to happen in the ring but confidently says, "I'm ready for whatever happens. I have several goals here and one is to make an impressive debut here in Canada, to let these people know that I can wrestle and that I represent the U.S. very well." Although he may not have impressed fans with his partiotism and tactics used in the ring to support it, he possesses a unique wrestling talent that would indeed make any nation proud. To give credit where credit is due, Blaze is a very well conditioned athlete. He may not be top of the list of fan favorites, but be is sure on his way to the top on the list of top contenders in this area, and is a rising star in the world of professional wrestling.

'Blazing' Bobby Blaze

four

Canada

Summer of ’91, and ’92

“Every worthwhile accomplishment has a price tag attached to it. The question is always whether you are willing to pay the price to attain it - in hard work, sacrifice, patience, faith, and endurance.” John C. Maxwell

One of the first contracts I ever signed was for Canadian Championship Wrestling up on the east coast of Canada. We traveled throughout New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. This territory used to be known as the old Grand Prix Wrestling territory. The wrestling style there was old school and the wrestlers all worked hard to put asses in the seats. This was a true wrestling territory.

I enjoyed and had much success in what used to be the old Grand Prix Wrestling territory up in Canada, when it was based out of Moncton, New Brunswick. It was known as Canadian Professional Wrestling the summers of 1991 and 92 when I wrestled there. This was my first official full-time wrestling gig and I worked with some truly talented wrestlers, including a bunch of hard working rookies and a few veterans who really showed me the ropes, pun intended. We worked seven nights a week, and many times did a “double shot” on Sundays. Doing a double shot is where you work or wrestle an afternoon show then hit the road like a bat out of hell to another town and wrestle that night as well. Mind you in those days I, as well as the rest of the crew, worked just as hard on the evening show as we had on the afternoon show. You have to give the fans their money’s worth, and I loved every night of the experience.

The first tour I did there was for sixteen straight weeks. We had one day off during that entire time. Here are just a few of the guys I worked with night in and night out and traveled with over the course of two summer

tours up on the Atlantic Coast side of Canada. Leo Burke was a truly talented wrestler who had been trained by two older brothers. He was a gifted wrestler, a talented worker, and a complete professional outside the ring. The Funks used to come to work in the Maritimes during the summer months back in the day, while The Cormier Brothers would often work in the Amarillo, Texas, territory or in Florida during the winter months and Canada in the summer. Leonce Cormier, AKA Leo Burke, had a style very similar to Terry Funk. At one time Burke, while working in the Maritimes, challenged Terry to a NWA Heavyweight Title match in Nova Scotia. They battled for 55 minutes, with Leo maintaining most of the match until Funk got himself disqualified. Due to the disqualification the title could not change hands. That really proves what kind of worker Leo Burke was and how much respect he had in the wrestling business. He was the original booker when I and my fellow Malenko trainee Rico Federico came into the territory.

Due to a recent auto accident prior to Rico's and my arrival, "Rotten" Ron Starr had just taken over as the main booker. He had a really good mind for the wrestling business and had been to Japan several times. Ron used to work Puerto Rico and several other territories when he was younger. He booked me in some pretty good matches including several in which I got to use fire, as in throwing fireballs into my opponents face, as "Blazin' Bobby Blaze." He also teamed Rico and myself up and we held the Canadian Tag-Team Championships belts for several months.

Other talents included "Bad Boy" Eddie Watts, who was a true young talent who had already worked in Mexico and Japan. Savvy ring veteran "Nature Boy" Goldie Rodgers was one of the top heels working there as well. All of these men had worked for Stampede Wrestling, the highly popular and successful promotion that Stu Hart and The Hart Family ran out of Calgary. The original "Beast," Beast Cormier, was on several of the shows as well, and the original "Cuban Assassin," Angel Escovedo, was a great grizzled veteran who I also had the pleasure of working with and who I learned so much about being a professional from during this time.

Along with myself and Rico, the territory had several young guys like Robert "The Arcadian Giant" Maillet, Soaring Eagle, and Todd McPhee.

All these guys worked especially hard each night to learn their craft and to help put asses in seats so we could all make a paycheck for that week. I have many great memories of these guys and a bunch more of the characters and people I met during those early years of my professional career.

don’t kick the midgets

I was traveling with my good friend and fellow Malenko training partner, Rico Federico, one time when we were supposed to pick up and bring two midgets with us for the tour. The little bastards canceled out at the last minute but we went on to the territory where the promoter raised nine kinds of hell and frantically called around to get fill-in midgets.

Hell, I don’t know where you get one midget let alone two. And, how the hell do you get fill-in midgets? This guy must have known more midgets than Willy Wonka. Anyway he found two midgets to fill in for a two week stretch on the tour.

On the last night that the midgets were to perform I was involved in a mixed tag match where I would team with one midget and Robert “The Arcadian Giant” would team with the other one. Robert was quite young back then and turned out to be one heck of a worker in the business. I always liked working with him and was glad that he eventually found success in the old WWF as part of the “Oddities” tag team. He also later found himself in a tremendous movie role opposite Robert Downey Jr. in the first Sherlock Holmes movie.

Back in the heel locker room, Bad Boy Eddie Watts told me to make sure to “give that damn midget an extra stiff kick in the finish.”

I had only been here two weeks but felt obligated to do what was asked of me. I never had any great love for the midgets to begin with, but I wasn’t so sure if I should kick one in the gut at the end of a match. But, hell the lil bastard had been on my nerves every night anyway, so I thought, why not?

The match proceeded as planned and when it was time for me to hit the ring on a sneaky tag, my midget partner held the other little guy expecting me to give him a swift kick to the gut. As the referee was with the giant so he couldn't see the action, I threw my right leg up for a stiff kick right when the baby face midget moved and I squarely kicked the living shit out of the other midget. I wonder if his turds were small? He flew backwards into The Giant's arms as planned and then Robert threw him into my arms, hey at least I caught him. Down I went with my midget on me, then the other midget on him, and the Giant on all of us for the three count.

Once outside the ring the midget and I argued over him costing me, well us, the match. Some of this was for show, while a little bit of it was a shoot as I wanted to knock his squatty ass off for being a little prick for two weeks. I finally reached down, grabbed him and gave him a suplex on the cold thin plywood that was covering the ice to the ice hockey rink that the wrestling ring was set up on at the time. Don't worry I didn't hurt him too bad, it was a short suplex.

Once I got back to the other side of the hockey rink, I sat down behind the Plexiglas to relax. With a little smirk on my young, inexperienced face, I sat there thinking, "Yep, I done the right thing. He had it coming."

It was about this time that a figure appeared out of the corner of my eye and a voice, spoken from under his breath, said, "Don't touch the midgets, or you're fired!" Quickly looking up, I noticed Leo Burke, one of the bookers and owners of the wrestling company. He repeated "Don't touch the midgets!" without breaking stride, he kept on moving back towards the baby face locker room as I sat there thinking, "Oh shit, I've been here two fuckin' weeks and I'm about to get fired. Fuck this! I've got nothing to return to. I better do what I'm told." I then got up and went into the heel locker room as the others guys were laughing about witnessing a midget getting kicked and suplexed by a grown man. I just laughed and thought to myself, "What a fuckin' business." But, I never touched the midgets again. In fact, while on tour in the same territory the following year I actually hung out and partied with a couple of the midgets.

must not speak english

Having mentioned the midget incident, I had only been in Canada for a couple of weeks and other than the promised advance in pay for travel to the territory I realized I hadn't actually been paid yet. The Maritimes is out on the east coast of Canada and my partner and I were staying in the town of Moncton, New Brunswick. After a few nights in the car, and one night sleeping at the local gym we found a really cool apartment right above this little Art Deco restaurant that was dirt cheap. It was perfect, a perfect one bedroom apartment for two guys that soon turned into four guys crashing there whenever we were in town.

"Tonight's an important night," Bad Boy Eddie Watts said as he entered the locker room on the third week of my first tour there in Canada. Looking up as I laced my white leather boots I asked, like an idiot, "Why is that my friend?" I was secretly hoping that tonight would be the night my partner and I might get to be in a tag team match. I was thinking maybe they'd put the tag titles on us. A thousand thoughts flooded my mind. "Because tonight is pay day and we get paid every Monday night in this territory."

Payday! Yes, finally some real money for my wrestling skills. I was about to be paid my weekly salary for doing something I truly loved, wrestling! I was a certified full-time pro wrestler. Does it get any better? Blazin' Bobby Blaze was getting paid, and I was going to "set the world of professional wrestling on fire!" I was paid a little over the five hundred dollars per week that I was supposed to make. I got the five hundred, plus some travel expenses, minus an advance I'd taken upon arrival and one check that was to be held back, then adding in money that I was actually owed for a few days from the previous week. I was stoked, until I later found out at the bank when I cashed my check that my five-hundred Canadian dollars, or monopoly money as I called it, came to about $473.00 in US funds. It really made me, as well as the other "boys" wonder, who the real "marks" were, the person sitting in the front row who paid all of seven dollars for a prime seat at a good wrestling show, or us, "the wrestlers" for working our asses off in the ring and only making about $67.00 US per night. At least the guy in the seats didn't have to take bumps and chair shots to the head night in and night out for giving up his seven dollars. It really makes you wonder.

Later, after the matches and after receiving my payoff, it was off to the supermarket to get some much needed groceries. We had been living on cold oatmeal in the mornings and a can of tuna for lunch. But dinner was special we had “oodles, and oodles, of fuckin’ hard noodles.” Rico and I used to laugh as we attempted to cook Ramen noodles up in hot tap water and they were still stiff and as tasteful as a hard dog turd frozen on a winter sidewalk.

As we approached the supermarket doors a very attractive lady carrying a baby in her arms was walking a few steps behind us. As Rico walked through the first set of doors I held the door open for the young lady with a small baby in her arms.

She then proceeded to place the small child into the shopping cart as I carried on saying things like, “Isn’t he cute? Look at you, hello, hello.” The second set of doors opened automatically as Rico was already through them and I was letting the lady walk in ahead of me while still speaking baby talk to her child. “How old are you? What’s your name?” I asked in all seriousness as this lady was giving me the strangest of looks. This is pre-Internet times and the term MILF wasn’t known, or if so, it wasn’t a popular term if it had been used during this time, but I dare say this lady was a MILF. Rico was telling me what an “F’n idiot” I was. Quickly realizing that many people in this area speak French as a first language, I looked, first to the lady then to my friend Rico, and said, “Hm, must not speak English.” The lady swiftly maneuvered her shopping cart as fast as she could through the open door and into the store. Rico was still laughing his ass off at me and my “Southern charm,” as he started screaming, “Of course it don’t speak English you fuckin’ hillbilly, it’s only a baby, and it’s only about seven months old. It doesn’t speak at all you dumbass!” Needless to say, I was a dumbass hillbilly, because I then realized that he was right. It was just a small baby and couldn’t speak any words, French, English, or otherwise. Note to self and others on the road: Don’t smoke hash and try to carry on conversations with seven month old babies. They won’t speak back to you, whether you’re high or straight edge.

pill lady

There's three important P's in the wrestling business, pills, pot, and pussy. If you don't have any pills or pot, and you don't wish to share that pussy, you may want to bring a pizza with you, and this may also get you into a certain guy's room. Every territory I worked in always had a person who could or would supply one of the three if not all three. "Pills, pills, and more pills," is all I can say about most of the recent deaths in the wrestling business. There's been far too many drug related deaths. There's really no one to blame except the person who just keeps taking and taking, and often times taking way too many pills. The blame goes on them, the person(s) taking the pills. Not all drugs are bad, some are great.

There seems to always be a steady supply of any kind of drug you can imagine on any wrestling show or in any wrestling company or territory. It's just part of the business. Personally, I wish this wasn't the case, but sadly it's a reality. Drugs are easy to obtain when you are out on the road. I found this out first hand when I went to work in my first territory. There was a lady that came to the shows every Saturday night, and she had a steady supply of just what the doctor ordered, and just what you needed. Her name was, "Pill Lady." I can honestly say that to this day, I never knew what her real name was.

All I know is she was a big fan of "the boys" and she had been "dying of cancer for years" from what I was told. She had anything and everything you needed or wanted, and all for only a dollar. Unreal. I'm no angel and after seventy six straight nights of taking bumps in a ring that felt like I was being slammed onto a surface that felt like it had been constructed of railroad tracks and concrete, it was time to find, "The Pill Lady." I'll just say this, what a relief it was to have her there for the boys, and not all drugs are bad, some are pretty fucking good.

One of the major problems of course is when you start letting the drugs do you, and you're not just taking them to eliminate the pain, anxiety, or whatever is ailing you. This is abuse, and this is where the problems start. You start depending on them to get by on an everyday basis. This is very easy to do unfortunately. It's easy for a doctor, promoter, one of the boys, or even a friend to say, "Here, take this, it'll make you feel better." You get up in the morning and take a pain pill, just to get out of bed, so you can make it

to the gym and work out. Then you take in some caffeine, speed, or both to work out. Then later that evening you're taking more pain meds so you can get through your match. After the match, you have a few beers and need to take some Valium or other sedative to help you fall back asleep that night. You might even throw in a muscle relaxer because by now you're tired, torn, and worn out. Mentally and physically you're just drained. But, once out of the limelight and back on the road in a lonely hotel room, as the adrenaline rush is gone, emotionally you're just zapped. Those walls just seem to close in closer and closer as the room seems to get smaller and smaller each night. As you can see, this becomes one big vicious cycle.

If you're not careful, you can become mentally and physically dependent on the drugs just to get from one day to the next. I'm thankful that I never let this become a big part of my life. I've used medications prescribed by doctors, and I know that my use has never risen to abuse in any way, shape, or form. That's why I'm so thankful that I've had a good doctor through the years, because I wanted to be monitored and be responsible.

There are tons of drugs that are prevalent in the wrestling business, but I think the number one killer is pain pills combined with continuous steroid use. I personally think that the pain medications are not that bad for someone who needs to go out and perform, especially when you truly are injured. One of the main problems though is when these guys just never come off the steroids. Again, this is not something that I ever did. I know steroids work. You have to work out hard and really watch your nutrition when using them. I personally don't think a cycle or two will harm or kill you. Again, it's a major problem when guys just use them continuously without ever coming off any cycle. Steroids were sometimes the key to helping someone get into the next booking or a better job with a bigger company. This of course means a bigger paycheck. So really it's hypocritical to look back and blame the key.

I do however wish that marijuana was legal in all states. I'm not talking about selling it to kids. I'm talking about it being sold under strict guidelines, if for nothing else at least for medical purposes. I know that there are many guys who would use medical marijuana instead of pain pills

if it were legal to use. I also think if it were legal, we, as a society, would have considerably fewer people that are addicted to pain pills. No, I don't want our children smoking grass or getting high, but I do think that if you are a responsible adult, you should have the choice to use marijuana if you so desire. Alcohol and tobacco are far more destructive to our society than weed. Again, that's just my opinion. To the best of my knowledge, there are zero marijuana deaths and it's illegal. Yet, cigarettes contribute to countless illnesses and deaths and they are legal. The same can be said about alcohol. Countless deaths! Take the time to wrap your brain around that one sometime. It just doesn't make sense to me.

But since hash and marijuana are not legal, as they should be, except in only fifteen states for medicinal purposes, thank God for "The Pill Lady." I'm neither condoning nor condemning the use of marijuana, only stating that I do think many pro wrestlers would still be alive today had they not taken legal pain pills. Even so, I blame no one but the wrestlers themselves for their early deaths if they abused pills and steroids. If you take away nothing else from what I'm saying, please, if you're a professional wrestler or pro athlete, at least keep yourself in check with the medications that you use. Please, learn to control your daily pill intake. Don't take too many, and only take them as prescribed and needed.

five

South Africa

“I was going to the worst place in the world, and I didn’t even know it yet.” Apocalypse Now

In February of 1992, I was living in Florida with my brother Jimm, and I was once again training back at Malenko’s four days per week. I was also wrestling on any show I could get booked on, which had me working for Florida Championship Wrestling, Sun Coast Pro Wrestling, and a bunch of other independent shows. In addition to wrestling almost nightly, I was helping train some of the new guys at Malenko’s wrestling camp. I was hitting the gym hard on a daily basis and also going through the conditioning training at the camp.

Even though I was making money from my bookings and picking up some side money helping at the camp, I was down to my last seven dollars. One rainy Thursday morning I got up and decided that I just wasn’t making enough money from my bookings, so I better get a real job during the day to support my wrestling habit. The only real bills and responsibility I had at the time were rent, which I split with my brother, and a car payment. Of course I knew that I needed money in order to eat and to survive, so on this particular day I went down to the headquarters of the Home Shopping Network and put in an application. They had me take a typing test, and answer some phone calls to see if I had what it took to qualify as a customer service rep. I was told that I could expect a call either later that day or the first thing in the morning to inform me about available schedules and possible starting dates. After the interview and test I returned to the apartment to lie back down for a nap before having to head out for weight training. No sooner had I laid my head down than the phone rang. I thought, “Damn, that was fast,” as I was thinking it was probably the people from HSN calling to put me on their schedule.

It wasn't. It was from one of the boys that I knew from the camp. He wanted to know if I was interested in going back to the WWF to do a few shows that were coming to the Florida area. I had already been on a few shows for WWF in the past, and I wasn't really interested in going back there at this time. It wasn't anything personal, it's just that I had, "been there, done that," and didn't think I wanted my career heading in that direction at that time. In the back of my mind, I knew I could surely use the money, but I also honestly thought that things would be all right if I just took a daytime job and kept training every night, and working my way back towards a more full-time schedule wrestling on the independent scene. I also had a connection at the gym where I trained who was willing to, "put in a good word" for me in the Memphis Territory. I had grown up watching the Memphis shows and I really wanted to work there. I told the guy on the phone that I would think about his offer, and told him that I'd let him know later that day if I was going to ride up and do the WWF shows. I said, "I'll get back in touch with you later today about the dates and the towns."

Then the phone rang again:

"Hello. This is Bobby Blaze."

"Bobby, Ron Starr. I'm booked on a tour for South Africa, the promoter there wants me to bring a partner. Are you interested?"

I had met "Rotten" Ron Starr on my first tour of Canada where he had taken over the booking responsibilities just prior to my arrival. Ron was a grizzled ring vet who had wrestled all over the world. He first broke into the wrestling business around 1975 and had held the NWA World Junior Heavyweight Title in 1976, a title that he would hold on and off again until the early 1980s. He had worked in Portland, California, and Kansas City territories throughout the years and held major titles in each of those territories. Ron eventually worked for Stu Hart's famous Stampede Wrestling based out of Calgary during that territory's heyday.

Ron had several tours of Japan under his belt and had worked in Mexico as well as Puerto Rico where he also helped with the booking. Ron had always been fair with me on my bookings in Canada, and helped me get

a push while I was still green and learning the ropes, so to say, while working on that first tour of Canada.

"Is this a rib? Where are you at Ron? Did you come to Tampa?"

"No, I'm serious Bobby. I'm booked to leave for South Africa tomorrow and the promoter needs another American wrestler. I thought of you."

After realizing that it was Ron and he was completely serious I said yes to leave the next day for a 28 day tour over in South Africa. The pay was going to be a grand a week. $1,000 a week! Can you believe this business? There I was ready to accept a regular job with regular pay when I get an offer to make a grand a week for the next three to four weeks, wrestling, getting to do something I loved doing anyway. I called back to the first guy and told him that I wasn't interested in going to the shows he'd lined up for WWF. I just told him a better deal had come through for me and I wouldn't be around during that time. I asked him to keep me in mind, knowing that the WWF or WCW would eventually be back through and they could always use talent to help put guys over on their TV tapings. I then called Malenko. I not only wanted but needed his advice. He told me as he had before, "Just make sure you have a round-trip ticket paid for before you leave the country. Don't ever leave the country without a round-trip ticket." I then began packing my bags, and waited for my brother to get home to give him the good news.

The next morning I flew out of Tampa to Miami then caught a flight to London, and then caught another flight to Johannesburg, South Africa, and once there, I still had another flight from Johannesburg to Durbin, South Africa. After thirty-three hours of total travel time with flights and layovers, I was exhausted. As soon as I stepped out of the jet plane, the hot air took my breath away. I gasped to breathe and the bright sun beamed down on me as if it were only a few feet above my head. Little did I know what kind of craziness I would be stepping into. After the many hours, now almost two days worth of non-stop travel, it wasn't long before I was informed that I was scheduled to have a match in less than five hours.

While standing in line at customs I heard the mumbling of the crowd and saw some movement throughout the crowd and really didn't give it much thought as I was just too tired from the travel. Just then I heard Ron saying, "Mandela. Bobby, move your bag. It's Mandela." I turned just in time to see Nelson Mandela walking at a slow pace with his security and bodyguards. I quickly moved my carry-on bag from the aisle as he parted the crowd of people like Moses parting the Red Sea. He walked right beside me almost brushing my right shoulder as he entered the customs line to the front. I had never been that close to someone that important in the world. You have to remember this was 1992 and South Africa was still dealing with their struggles with Apartheid. This man had been locked up on Robben Island for nearly twenty years and another eight years at Pollsmoor Prison before his eventual release after spending close to twenty-seven years in prison for speaking up against racism, segregation, and apartheid.

After clearing customs, Ron and I waited another hour for the promoter to pick us up from the airport. I should have known that this was going to be a long tour and a struggle because the moment that the promoter arrived he asked us for our passports. I knew better than to give up my passport for some Pakistan Indian. I had heard that there were several wrestlers that had unknowingly given up their passports while on tour there only to serve jail time for working a day after their work visas had expired. This shifty promoter had told them that everything would be all right only to later have them arrested after their last show in order to avoid paying them. He personally had them arrested and then had them deported once their tour had ended. Upon initially meeting this promoter, I knew that he was a shady character. Ron and I were also to be given five-hundred US dollars up front upon arrival as a "good faith" fee for showing up. Within five minutes I had "no faith" in the promoter.

After the promoter was denied our passports, he started complaining that I wasn't big enough to face his heavyweight and he didn't want us on the tour. This was after all the travel and the expense of two round trip tickets. We hadn't even left the airport and there was already trouble brewing. The promoter finally agreed to hand us some cash and decided to continue the tour. One of Malenko's sayings echoed in my head, "There's only two kind of promoters, bad and worst." Well this promoter was the

worst kind, he was real pond scum. I was at least smart enough to not leave the US without having a round-trip ticket paid for up front. Never leave the country without a round-trip ticket. If nothing else, I could fly back to Tampa and take that job at The Home Shopping Network, which was sounding really good at about that time. The piece of crap handed us, not five-hundred US dollars, but about two-hundred and twenty dollars in Rand. I'd soon find out that Rand was the currency of the country and it wasn't worth much in money exchange terms. Then again this was better than a cold boot in the ass, at least for the time being. After much discussion, disputes, and disruptions, Ron and I agreed to stay on the tour. We were then taken to a seaside condo on the Indian Ocean. We couldn't believe this guy. He went from trying to take our passports, refusing to pay in US dollars, and almost sending us back to the states to putting us up in a nice condo. What a business!

I was scheduled to face Donnie Vargas in a best two out of three falls match later that evening. The professional wrestling matches in South Africa were divided into rounds, pretty much like professional boxing matches. Donnie had been an Olympic contender back in 1980 at the Summer Olympics in which the US had boycotted the games in Moscow. Donnie weighed a solid 275 pounds and I could see where, at 220 pounds, the promoter didn't think I was big enough to face his champion. Once that first round started and due to my training and conditioning, all doubts were removed. I had to protect myself for sure but due to my ability to take care of myself in the ring, things went off as planned. I was thankful for the training and street smarts that I had during that first round because things could have gone very differently if I hadn't learned to protect myself and take control of things in the ring. After the first round which went almost four minutes, Donnie had discovered that I could take care of myself and that I wasn't afraid to "go if we had to go," as I put it to him in the ring. After we exchanged several wrestling moves and counter moves, I just let it be known that we could work or we could fight. I let it be known that things would be a lot easier for both of us if we just worked. He agreed and I went over in the second round and worked out a good finish for the third and final round with him going over in front of the South African crowd which was made up of blacks, whites, and Pakistan Indians. The matches I would soon find out were a lot easier to deal with than the racial barriers and a

crooked promoter, but, all things said, my first day in South Africa had ended far better than the way it had started when I stepped off that plane.

I won't mention the pond scum promoter's name here, but the guys who worked tours there are well aware of who he was and how crooked he was. He was just a real rotten bastard. In some of the towns that he promoted, the fans consisted of mostly Pakistan idiots, that were ready to riot during the matches and actually did one night after Ron and I worked as a tag-team in the main event against a masked wrestler and a Pakistan wrestler. We were wrestling at an indoor soccer field that had barricades with big nets separating the fans in the stands from the ringside seats. Those crazy ass Pakis were tossing everything from bottles of beer and sodas to chairs and rocks over the top, pelting everyone else in their attempts to hit us. We had a bodyguard that night who suffered a busted head as a full can of coke hit him on the way to the back. Ron and I held chairs over our heads as we barely made it to the locker room. We had to be escorted out of the building by the South African police, and those guys had to live there, so let's just say our escorts were sub-par at best. On a brighter note, and this has nothing to do with race, Ron and I worked for two white promoters there who treated us very well. One was a guy they called Colonel Sanders because he looked exactly like old Harlan himself. We also worked for a guy named Paul who would later help us get our money exchanged over to US dollars and get us out of this crazy country. Like the song says, "two out of three ain't bad." We ended up staying a total of twenty-one days on tour going from Johannesburg to Cape Town and several smaller cities in between.

I'm not sure if I'd call some of the craziness and mishaps while I was in South Africa adventures or nightmares, but it turned out to be one of the weirdest and wildest three week periods of my life. We were scheduled to stay twenty-eight days but the tour was cut short due in part to the riot that we had been involved in as well as us being pissed off that we hadn't been paid all of our money after a couple of the matches. A big plus in our favor and another reason we were able to get out of South Africa was that Ron and I had been in constant contact with the US Embassy from the second day after the tour started. The guy at British Airways who exchanged our tickets so we could bump our departure date up a week, came back to us

and said, “I don’t know what you guys have done while here, but the US Embassy said, ‘Whatever you do, get those two guys out of this country tonight.’” I was never so happy to be on a jet airliner in my life. “London calling!” I had a five hour layover before I finally touched back down in Florida and literally got off the plane and kissed the ground.

While touring South Africa I saw some pretty wild things. One of the most obvious things that I saw was the difference in class and race. The whites were the minority and they still had control of the government at this time, but you could tell things were changing, but at a slow pace. “The Right to Admit” was on signs it seems everywhere Ron and I went. This didn’t just mean that the local business that displayed that sign wouldn’t admit or permit blacks on their premises, it meant anyone that the local business owner didn’t want to do business with, they didn’t have to. We were both asked to leave a gym during a workout because we were “scaring my customers” as the guy put it in his high effeminate voice. We were just warming up with 135 pounds on the weight bench when we noticed that several men were sitting around in the nude watching us. It was a gay health club. He was kind enough to tell us of a location that we would feel more comfortable in. We later found a big “old school” weight lifting club that we used while we were there. We really had no idea that the club was for the gay community of old men, just like we soon found out that Sunday nights in Cape Town was also gay night at The Hard Rock. Let’s just say it was a different kind of Hard Rock Cafe than we were used to visiting. We had been to the beach earlier in the day and spotted the restaurant and thought maybe we would visit there later in the evening.

We had been either flying or catching rides with the promoter when going from town to town, but we also used these little white mini-vans or buses that you paid one rand to jump on and off of as you traveled through the crowded streets. There would be fifteen to twenty people just jumping on and off at every stop light. We also had a cab driver that we had befriended one night at the hotel who agreed to pick us up whenever we needed a more private ride. We had stayed mostly at the condo, but there were a few nights when we had to check out and go to a hotel. On this particular night the promoter had ordered us a plate of hors d’oeuvres that ended up being nothing more than a plate of raw meat that the hotel billed

us seventy-five Rand for. They also stole our clothes that they had convinced us to send out for cleaning. I'm just glad that I didn't send out my stinky wrestling gear. I did part with a pair of boots that one of the South African boys wanted, and besides, I needed the money as that no good son-of-a-bitch promoter wasn't giving us any.

At any rate, when we called our number one cab driver and told him to take us down to the beach Hard Rock, he asked us if we were sure we wanted to go there on this night. We assured him that we did and agreed that we wanted to go there and get a beer and a tee-shirt if nothing else. We weren't there twenty minutes before it dawned on us that everyone in the bar was a guy and they all happened to be there with other guys. As we walked out the cabbie was there waiting for us. "I told you, you wouldn't like it there," he snickered.

One night we were told not to tell the hotel personnel that we were wrestlers, and to just go directly to our rooms. It's kind of hard to hide that fact when two pretty big guys, one with scars all over his forehead and the other with long bleached hair walk in at midnight carrying bags. The next morning right after a buffet style breakfast our bags were waiting right there in the lobby along with a South African policeman kindly pointing to the "Right to Admit" sign. He said that the hotel management told him, "Wrestlers eat too much and are no longer welcomed here."

Shortly after walking out of the hotel, I was sure glad that I had already eaten, because the sight before me would have killed my appetite. Unlike Ron and myself, who were ejected peacefully from the premises, some poor bastard had either jumped or been pushed from what looked like about six stories up. If we hadn't stopped for a couple of minutes prior to leaving the hotel lobby he probably would have landed right on us. We had just turned the corner and there he was. Plop! His body was just lying there all splattered and mangled and people had already begun gathering around as the first responders weren't even on the scene yet.

After a quick look, we just kept moving along minding our own business. We sure as hell didn't want to stand out there any longer than we had to. Who knows, they may have said we were the ones that made the guy jump or that we were the ones who had pushed him. We weren't gonna

stand around for questioning, so we quietly and quickly made our way past the gawking crowd and headed towards the beach area in search of another telephone. One thing for sure, we weren't sticking around that hotel to find out what had happened.

Once we got to the beach, we hung out for a few minutes talking to some locals and trying to figure out what our next move was going to be, as we had nowhere else to go. The promoter told us that he wouldn't be by to pick us up for another couple of hours. We once again called our favorite cab driver to see if he could score us a little "refreshment" if you will from the local day traders.

You never really get to know a city until you go to an area that isn't necessarily on the main road if you know what I mean. We ended up in a little part of town that looked battle weary and bullet ridden, sitting in a small white car that was used as a cab. The South African police were in a cruiser sitting directly across from us, watching. I can't be for sure, but judging from the section of town we were sitting in, they had more important activities that they were focusing on. The cabbie came rushing back and jumped into the car. He then threw us a wrapped up newspaper, the cartoon section of all things, and said not to worry about the police. "They have more important stuff to do around these parts. Besides they know my car here and know I'm not a big dealer." I guess my instincts were right. Great, I thought, we're not going to end up going to jail over a twenty dollar pot buy. My mind wasn't eased any as they followed us back towards the edge of town. "Paranoia, mind destroya!" Eventually we made our way back to the condo where the promoter once again dropped us off and as predicted, disappeared. We unwrapped the newspaper only to discover more pot than I had ever seen in any one place at one time, even being from Kentucky where seeing weed was no big deal. Although I never was a big time smoker, I had tried pot before and had an idea of about how much twenty dollars would get you. Upon opening the paper we were shocked to see just how much weed we had received. I hadn't tried that many different kinds of marijuana, but I knew enough that once I took a hit, I could tell it had a funny taste. I figured it probably wasn't any good and we had been ripped off, and at that point I couldn't have cared less. I wasn't really into getting high or smoking dope at any time during my life, so to me it wasn't

any big deal. That was until about thirty minutes later when it felt like someone had walked up behind me and slugged the back of my head with a baseball bat. “WHAM! POW! BOOM!” It was “creep weed.” It creeped right up on me. One minute I was standing there brushing my teeth and getting ready to head out for a movie, when it hit me. Wow! That stuff hit me like I couldn’t believe as I stood there laughing at myself in the mirror and yelling over to Ron, “Hey! I have a buzz,” in a loud voice. Yep I was stoned. That was the last time I ever tried that shit. We ended up giving every bit that we had left to some street artist type guy who was drawing with chalk on the sidewalk down near the beach.

Over all, the trip to South Africa was just that bad. As mentioned, we ended up leaving the country a week short of the actual tour’s ending date, and it was just an all around bad deal from the get go. I ended up scaling down the side of my hotel room wall to avoid paying and keeping the little money that the promoter had given us for the room the night before. Ron and I then caught a bus back to Johannesburg, a grueling eight hour ride that started off heading from the south and traveling north when out of nowhere, the bus came to a stop. Looking around, there was nothing to be seen for miles. The driver then asked everyone to get off the bus and remove all of our carry on stuff and then to remove all of our luggage and baggage from under the bus once we were off. We were then instructed to, “Walk until you see the next patch of blacktop.” The bus then began to travel over a rugged pasture for about five hundred yards as we all walked behind it, carrying our belongings in the sweltering heat. Then, just like that, in the middle of nowhere another highway picked back up that headed east to west toward Johannesburg. It was one of the strangest things I’ve ever seen. One highway that was heading in one direction just came to an end at a big field, then another road, again appearing out of nowhere, right on the edge of nothingness started. It was just a paved road that started heading in a completely different direction. So, all the passengers loaded everything back onto the bus, and off we went now heading west towards Johannesburg.

After three weeks of being on tour and collecting as much money as we could from the crooked promoter, which was like trying to squeeze blood from a turnip, had he not given us what money he had, between Ron

and myself we were going to squeeze the blood from his body, and he knew it too. We did receive our complete payoffs from the other two promoters, “Colonel Sanders,” and Paul. Once I placed all my money together I thought that I had a lot of cash. The largest bill or Rand is a fifty spot, and I had quite a few of those in my wrap. Well I was wearing a “fanny pack,” for those who remember how all the wrestlers used to wear them along with their baggy pants back in the day, and it was stuffed with my money. Mine had plenty of fifties and twenties in it. I really thought I had a large amount of cash on me once the tour was over. Now, at the airport, awful things still continued to take place as I went through a lot of trouble trying to exchange the rand bills into US dollars. Not knowing what the exchange rate was on the currency, I had that gut feeling that I was about to be bent over once again, and I was right. After filling in all the proper forms and papers, and handing over my thick wad of money, the lady at the exchange office handed me back nine one-hundred dollar bills, four twenties, a ten, a five, and four ones. Yes, I had exactly $999.00 for the full three week tour. All this? And I thought that I was going to make a grand a week. So much for a good payoff, but at least I was getting out of this God forsaken country alive.

Rico Federico, Frankie Reyes, and Bobby Blaze in Australia

six

Australia ’93

“Once you pick up pen and paper, you can take people on a journey anywhere. The trouble is they come back later on and ask, ‘Is that true?’ I say, ‘Who gives a shit?’” Mark Brandon ‘Chopper’ Read

“Shut your legs you fat ass!” I screamed from the middle of the ring after I was just the victim of an arm-drag from Mark Mercedes, one of the Australian wrestlers my partner, Rico Federico, and I were facing that night in a heated tag-team match.

The pressure was intense as the wild crowd of 500 excited Aussies yelled for their boys to “whip them dammed Yankees’ asses!”

We were wrestling in one of the smaller towns booked on a first-class wrestling tour called “WrestleRiot 93” and you could tell that the fans were mostly working class and many were consuming lots of cold Australian beer. It had been years since any professional wrestling had been brought into this area of Australia.

Looking out over the crowd something caught my eye that pissed me off more than the blood and sweat that were dripping down on my chest from my opponent’s nose. Scanning the crowd and through the lights, I saw a fat chick sitting on the steps in the middle of the aisle with her chubby legs spread wide and her big mouth cheering for the USA. Make that 499 fans that were cheering loudly for the home town favorites and one fat chick yelling even louder for the bad guys.

“You’re a bleeder man, you gotta slow down. Catch your breath, and hang on to this hold until I tell you to tag out.”

My opponent looked down at his own blood dripping onto me and asked, “What?”

I calmly replied, “I said you’re bleeding, calm down.”

Then I not so calmly yelled out again to the fat cunt sitting on the steps to, “Shut your legs you fat ass, and shut up! I’m trying to win a match here and I can’t concentrate with you screaming out and having to look up your dress and see your fat ass in those granny panties!”

The fans erupted with more cheering but by now there was even a louder roar of laughter than cheering!

I reached up as I came up to my knees, and grabbed my “enemy” by the hair and told him to, “Tag out, and have Greg arm-drag me.” The mat action continued as once again all I saw were the bright lights above and those God forsaken white panties. Big Ones!

Well, as you can tell from this quirky little story the Australian tour was a lot of fun. There were many nights of fun traveling, wrestling, drinking cold beer, and enjoying the many great fans in Australia. Many of the cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and the National Capital of Canberra drew thousands of fans each night.

australia tour

After touring Canada twice, and not just touring but working there full time in the old Grand Prix territory, and completing a wild and disturbing tour of South Africa, I returned to Tampa and in addition to continuing my own training at Malenko’s Wrestling Academy, as it was now being called, I began training and helping some of the newer students whose numbers seemed to increase each and every week. Coach, or Mr. Malenko, as I was now calling him was having some minor health issues, and Dean was touring Japan more and more during this time, so my old tag partner, Rico, and I were now assisting at the camp. We usually led off with the traditional conditioning exercises and taught some of the basics of pro style wrestling. Along with my regular bookings, this was a nice way to earn a little extra money a couple days a week.

One Sunday morning Rico and I went to the Tampa Airport and picked up two young men who had arrived from Australia. Even though there wasn't going to be any training on this particular Sunday, and despite their jet-lag, their first and foremost priority was that they wanted to go over to the industrial park where the new training center was now located. They wanted to see the gym, rings and training area, after they had traveled so far to begin their training. The two guys were Greg Smit and Mark Mercedes and they were both excited about starting their wrestling careers and seemed to be very pleasant young men.

They both trained hard and each went on to have good careers in professional wrestling. Greg would go on to eventually tour Japan for one of the shoot groups there, and Mark ended up with several tours of Germany, Japan, Australia, as well as having tryouts with WCW and working for several independent companies in the US. Of course this was all much later.

After their training was completed at Malenko's they returned to Australia and helped set up a deal for a huge wrestling tour that had been in the works there for some time. They continued to work out the details and eventually, with the help of a rock promoter and with a travel agency's backing they arranged what would become the aforementioned "WrestleRiot 93."

Back at Malenko's, they had told us about their plans for this tour and that it was their intention to use some of the guys from the training camp, including Joe and Dean Malenko, along with Rico and myself, if and when the tour took place.

Months after their training had been completed and a few more months after they returned home, they went to work on setting this tour up. Let me tell you, from the moment that I caught news that I was to be a part of this tour, I was stoked! My mom had always told me that she dreamed of one day going to Australia, and here I was presented with the chance to travel to this beautiful and wonderful country. Not only was I going to get the opportunity to visit it, I was also going to have my round-trip ticket, hotel accommodations, and at least one meal a day paid for in addition to being paid a nice weekly salary to wrestle in "The Land Down Under." This was a

once in a lifetime kind of opportunity, and also like a dream come true, not only for me, but I think for my mother as well, as she was going to see Australia vicariously through me. She may have been even more excited for me than I was for myself. I know this really made her proud that I had an opportunity to travel to and visit a country that she had only dreamed about going to one day. Mere words can't describe, nor can I explain how excited she was for me to have this unique chance.

She also knew that I worked hard and had sacrificed much to achieve many of my goals in wrestling. She knew that I had passed up a couple of good paying job opportunities to continue my dream of being a professional wrestler and I know she was very pleased and proud of me for being so dedicated to something which I loved and had such a passion for, pro wrestling. It seemed at this point in my life, the hard work, and the passion, were beginning to pay off.

In February of 1993 I left my hometown and drove three hours to Columbus, Ohio to catch what would soon be the first of many flights over the course of the next thirty days. I caught a connecting flight to Los Angeles and after a layover in LA, I was off to Honolulu, Hawaii, for a brief plane change before heading to Sydney, Australia. Once I arrived in Sydney, I was picked up and taken to the Ritz Carlton Hotel and all I can say is, from this point on, everything on the Wrestle Riot Tour was first class. Mike was a rock-n-roll concert promoter and Ian, owned the travel agency that helped put us in some of the finest hotels all around Australia such as The Ritz Carlton in Sydney, and the Hilton in Melbourne. The wrestlers who were fortunate to be booked on this tour were treated like royalty. The tour itself was well organized, publicized, and promoted. There were huge posters that covered the downtown areas, newspaper articles, magazine articles, as well as national coverage for some of the stars that were booked on this tour. Here's a brief rundown of the guys booked on the tour: Jake "The Snake" Roberts, Don "The Rock" Morocco, Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart, JYD-"The Junk Yard Dog," all fresh off WWF television. Joe and Dean Malenko, Jushin "Thunder" Liger, from Japan, Chris Benoit, from Canada, AJ Freeley, from New Zealand, and Mark Mercedes and Greg Smit, representing Australia. Rico and myself rounded out the tour. Frankie Reyes, a friend of mine and a good friend to the Malenko family was also

booked as the tour's official referee. I don't know how Frankie managed to ref all those matches and the different styles every night, but he did one heck of a job. There were a few other guys who worked on some of the shows, but this was the core of the group of stars who got to travel via jet airplane and private bus throughout this tour.

The beauty of this tour in addition to getting to visit and see this beautiful and friendly country was that each night, the wrestling card was loaded with talent from bottom to top. On any given night you could see many of the top guys fresh off WWF TV in a really good wrestling match, and I admit, they were entertaining matches, but to a fan like myself, I truly enjoyed seeing the guys like The Malenko Brothers, and Liger and Benoit work. I personally saw a couple of my all-time favorite and what I would call legitimate five-star matches while on this tour. Liger versus Benoit tore the house down on several nights, with a couple of their matches being against each other. But, they also teamed up on several shows to wrestle Joe and Dean in tag matches, and let me just say, you haven't see a tag match like the ones these four guys put on during this tour. Personally, I wrestled in singles matches against Rico, AJ, Greg, and Mark, and I also had a couple of tag matches, teaming with Rico and wrestling against the Australians. There were a couple of nights that battle royals were held and they were actually fun to compete in, due to the amount of talent, and the good nature of everyone competing in them. Usually battle royals aren't much fun and are usually boring for the wrestlers, but these were set up in a way that made them fun for the boys and especially fun for the fans.

So many people know about Dean Malenko, Chris Benoit, and Liger, and their talents, especially in the US, but there are a lot of fans who really have never seen just what kind of performer, worker, and legitimate shooter Joe Malenko was in the world of pro wrestling. He was by far one of the best craftsmen in the wrestling business. He was trained as a shooter by Karl Gotch as well as his father when he was young. Joe, like his father and Karl, was known for his personal and ring conditioning, which was second to none. He helped me while we were on this tour with some of my workouts and furthered my conditioning training. I tried to work out each day with a different guy while on the tour, but it was Joe who put me through a leg workout one day that really opened my eyes to a way to

combine weight training with the conditioning exercises. If I hadn't been in the shape I was in during this point in my career, I wouldn't have been able to walk for the next few days, let alone wrestle that evening after completing one of the leg workouts Joe put me through.

Joe had worked for the UWF in Japan, and later All-Japan. He held the AJPW World Junior Heavyweight Title from 1989 through 1990. One of the best all-time tag team matches I ever watched was over at Malenko's house when I was in training. It was a match that had been taped in Japan featuring The Malenko Brothers against The British Bulldogs. This guy could just flat out wrestle and work. Joe also had some outstanding singles matches against his brother Dean. These were just textbook matches that rank among some of the top wrestling matches of all time for those fans who really appreciate guys who work to get over, which of course, gets the match itself over. It's truly great stuff to watch. Like Joe Malenko said, "If you put the match over, you get yourself over. It is never about a single match, but more about a long successful run! This is a business where you need to stay safe, protect the body of the guy trusting you, and make money."

As for the matches on the card, the guys that had formerly worked for the WWF, JYD, Jake, and those guys, well they were all "over" with the fans and having been fresh off worldwide television, they were the most well known and were of course fan favorites going into each and every match. Of course they had their typical WWF style matches, which isn't to take anything away from their work or their styles, but when the fans had the chance to see the matches that took place involving Joe, Dean, Chris, and Liger, well, they basically went out each night and blew the roof off the arenas. Every night, no matter what the combination was, whether it was a tag or a singles match, if these guys were involved, the place just exploded and the fans were in awe of their in-ring styles and their craftsmanship. Sure there were flashy moves, but the wrestling moves and combinations of high spots were and are rarely seen, even by today's standards. Many fans, except maybe in Japan, had never seen anything like the athleticism and wrestling skills that these men possessed.

The trip and tour itself was first class as mentioned. The promotion that was responsible for our tour had just finished promoting a hugely popular and I'm sure quite profitable three week tour for Guns-n-Roses, and after our three weeks they would have Elton John coming over to their beautiful country for a three week tour as well. When these guys ran a show it was top notch. When I first arrived in my hotel room there was a bottle of Jack Black, Jack Daniels whiskey, waiting in my room. Everyone received one. Every night at the shows, catering was provided with excellent meals from steaks, chicken, fish to pasta dishes, salads, and deserts. After each show they had two big 55 gallon drums filled with bottles or cans of either VB, Victoria Bitter, or Fosters Beer on ice. I preferred the Fosters, but I didn't complain if I had to grab a VB on the way out the door after the matches. Like I always said and still do, the best kind of beer is free beer.

So yeah, overall I had a fun trip to Australia. The tour was a huge success. We flew from city to city every day and wrestled every night. I had the opportunity to meet some really neat and nice people. I got to watch some of the best wrestling matches I've ever seen live and the people associated with the tour were first class. They all were so nice to not only the wrestlers, but they were nice to each other as well. The wrestlers were all professional and acted as such. The locker room morale was upbeat and everyone worked hard each and every night.

As an added bonus, I met a young man from New Zealand, named, Frank Shanley, who used to promote professional wrestling shows and who also published a wrestling magazine. I had become friends with him through snail mail, and we have remained friends through the years. He even put my picture on the front of his wrestling magazine. How cool is that? There's all these big stars on the tour, and Bobby Blaze makes the special tour issue of the magazine. Thanks Frank. I would also again like to thank Mike, the rock concert promoter and Ian and his travel agency for all the airline tickets and for putting us up in such nice accommodations. Of course, this was made possible by two young men who had a dream to become professional wrestlers. I was fortunate enough to help train them before they went back to Australia and helped organize a first class wrestling promotion called, International Wrestling Australia. They helped put together the Wrestle Riot Tour '93, along with Dean's booking ideas.

Thanks Greg and Mark for helping set up such a successful tour, and thanks Dean for booking me on the Wrestle Riot ’93 Tour! Fun times indeed and a once in a lifetime experience for a guy from a small town in Kentucky.

Bobby in the ring with Mark Mercedes in Australia

BLAZE
MIU

seven

Smoky Mountain Wrestling

“Bobby Blaze! The second most famous man from Ashland, Kentucky! Charles Manson being the first!” Jim Cornette

I caught my first big break in the US when I had a tryout match with Smoky Mountain Wrestling. After nine months of constant contact with Jim Cornette, I finally landed a job working for SMW out of Morristown, Tennessee in the winter of 1993, shortly after returning from the “WrestleRiot Tour” in Australia.

I was living in Florida with my brother and helping out at and working out at Malenko’s School when I ran into Tommy Rodgers of “The Fantastics.” He told me that Cornette was starting a new territory up around the area I was from. We stopped and had a short talk and he gave me Cornette’s phone number and told me to call, so later that evening I called Jimmy. He was quick and to the point that he was on the other line, but would get right back to me. Well, of course sitting by the phone like a teenage girl waiting for the big campus stud to call me back, he didn’t. Dang! I hate that feeling of being stood up to be asked out. The next day I ran into Tommy again down by a gym my brother and I used to work out at every morning. “Hey Bobby, how did your talk with Cornette go?” I explained that Cornette was busy and never returned my call, but that I did at least speak briefly with Cornette.

“You home around nine in the evenings?”

“Yeah, I’ll be home around that time for sure.”

“Good. Stay by the phone, I’ll have Jimmy call you tonight.”

I thanked him and told him that I would see him around, either at the gym or over at Malenko’s ring if he stopped by for some ring time.

At nine o'clock that evening James E. Cornette called me back. He first said that he was sorry that he couldn't get back to me the night before and sounded very sincere and professional. He said he knew who I was and that Tommy had put me over to him and thought that I'd be worth looking at to use on his shows in his new start-up promotion, Smoky Mountain Wrestling. I explained to him that I was in Florida for a few more months and was staying booked regularly. I also told him that I would be returning to Kentucky sometime in early June for a couple of weeks before I was to return to my second tour back up in Canada for Canadian Championship Wrestling. He explained that, that sounded perfect as he had not yet gone full-time but was expanding into other states and was working on the details of his television production. He said his goal was to be up and running full time in just a few months and mentioned that if he had a spot and went full-time that he would be interested in using me when they were in my area. I was pumped to say the least.

Sometime in early June of 1992 I was home in Kentucky, as I had finished up my bookings in Florida and I had about two weeks before my starting date back up in Canada. Luckily for me, during this time period SMW was running a show about an hour from my house in Paintsville, Kentucky. I had spent a week or two at a time in Paintsville during many summers as a youth, as I had several aunts, uncles, and cousins from there.

I drove back down Route 23, that Country Music Highway one more time, just to get a chance to deliver some promo pictures and a video, VHS of course, and looking forward to speaking to Jimmy in person. I was also invited to watch the show and "See if you think you can fit in with the guys that are currently working for me," when Jimmy and I spoke once again on the phone. Once I arrived, Jimmy and I sat down and talked, and we had a very nice professional conversation. He said he still didn't have a full-time crew, but he had several towns booked several months in advance and he was finalizing the details for his SMW TV program. He took my photos, video, and my contact number and wished me well on my upcoming tour.

I then went up into the bleachers near the baby face side of the gym to watch the show. First out was a young guy called, "Dixie Dynamite" going against "Killer" Kyle. It was an impressive opening match. I also saw

Robert Gibson and “Primetime” Brian Lee and I spoke to both of them about the promotion and how things were going, asking if they liked working in SMW. We basically just bullshitted around as they waited for their matches later in the card. There were six matches in total that evening and every one was impressive. Among the other wrestlers working that night were Jimmy Golden, “Dirty” Dutch Mantel, and of course James E. Cornette. Cornette, of course, generated a great crowd reaction and got tons of heat as he managed “The Midnight Express,” Stan Lane and “Beautiful” Bobby Eaton. Yes, I could see myself working with this group of talented wrestlers. I thought to myself that I would fit in nicely, even if it just meant doing TV tapings, but I could see myself doing a lot more than TV for and with this new promotion once Corny got this thing going full-time.

Fast forward to March of 1993. “Tell ’em I’ll call ’em back,” I told my younger brother. I was worn out from a combination of last night’s drive and jet lag from a recent tour of Australia. “It’s Jim Cornette,” I heard my brother say as I tried to kick out of my slumber…

Bobby Blaze tries out for SMW

Shortly after the Australia tour, Bobby Fulton called me to see if I was interested in coming in and doing a show for him. Bobby was the tag-team partner of Tommy Rodgers, and the two had wrestled together with much success as “The Fantastics.” Bobby told me that both Tommy Rodgers and Dean Malenko had told him that I could work. He mentioned that if the things he’d heard about my wrestling style and talents were true that he would consider using me on many upcoming shows for his “Big Time Wrestling” promotion.

I did go and do the show that he booked me on. I was jet-lagged, and worn out, but I loved wrestling so I accepted the booking. I wasn’t sure what kind of payoff he was going to give me, but I knew I wanted to wrestle and see what kind of opportunity Bobby was offering. I really didn’t know what he expected of me and how he was going to use me on his show. I didn’t know if he just needed me to come in and do a quick job, actually

work a match just to help “put someone over,” or actually use me in a way that would keep advancing my career.

Fortunately for me it was the latter of the three. I felt really good that such a seasoned veteran thought so highly of me. It was also a good feeling knowing that two other seasoned and well respected wrestlers thought highly enough of me to give me a good recommendation to Bobby. He really needed some talent to fill in on his shows and I am still thankful to Bobby for this match and the opportunities he gave me, because unbeknownst to me, he had told Cornette about my work rate, talent, and professionalism.

This all led to the phone call from Cornette. I also received many more bookings from Bobby and had fun working on all his shows as he paid me well and used me in key spots on all his shows. While working on Bobby’s shows I also met one of the most unique individuals I have ever met in my life. That person was manager “Classy” Roy Bass. As mentioned, Bass really knew how to “get heat” during the shows, no matter who he was managing or what angle or feud he was involved in. Bass mainly managed on the independent circuit for different promoters including Bobby, and later on for a promotion that I started and owned called “Championship Professional Wrestling.”

Some of the talent that Bass managed included myself, Abdullah “The Butcher,” The Batten Twins Brad and Bart, “Hustler” Rip Rogers, and Doug Vines from “The Devils Duo,” all of whom once worked for the old ICW owned by the Poffos. He also managed “The Stro,” who worked as Gorgeous George III, and former WWF Champion, “The Iron Sheik.”

Many people had ‘heat’ with Bass through the years, but he and I got along just fine. We made some good money together in CPW and working together for other independent promotions. We still stay in contact with each other even today, talking about the business and how much fun we had on road trips. He was a true heel while managing and he’s still a heel outside the ring as well, especially at restaurants. Please Roy, let us finish our meals before you go off and get us kicked out of another restaurant. Thanks. Thanks for the memories in the ring and on the road as well.

Once I shook off the shock that Jim Cornette was on the phone, I said yes that I would be willing to come to Beckley, West Virginia, for a tryout match for SMW. He said that the pay would be right, and that it would be an actual tryout match, and he wasn't bringing me in just to do a job. Like I said earlier, he had said he had heard good things about me and that Bobby had told him to give me a call if he needed someone who could work. I recalled that during one of our earlier phone conversations Cornette had told me that if SMW went full-time, and if they had any shows in my home area, he would give me a call. Beckley was only about an hour and a half away from my home in Kentucky. Cornette wanted to watch me work in person, as now he not only knew who I was, but thanks to the matches I had worked for Bobby Fulton, Bobby had recommended to Jimmy that he take a serious look at me. Cornette thought this would be the perfect opportunity for him to take that look at me in the ring, and I am forever thankful that he did.

"Bobby Blaze! The second most famous man from Ashland, Kentucky!" Cornette said as he entered the locker room. My mind raced quickly, thinking maybe he's talking about Billy Ray Cyrus, being first with his recent success with his country music song called "Achey Breaky Heart." "Charles Manson being the first!" I heard him say as I suddenly snapped back into the conversation.

I remember sitting in that SMW locker room with the likes of Jimmy Golden, Dr. Tom Prichard, Stan Lane and "Beautiful" Bobby Eaton. They were very professional and personable. This was also the first time that I met Brian Hilderbrand, aka, "Mark Curtis," the official referee for SMW. Jimmy Golden shared a few old Boris Malenko stories with me about their time together back when they both worked for Southern Championship Wrestling, and he jokingly said he hoped that I wasn't as "stiff" as Boris was in the ring. Bobby Eaton, who had always had the reputation of being one of the nicest guys in the wrestling business, offered me some candy, and we carried on a conversation like we had known each other for years. I bet to this day you won't find one person to say anything bad about Bobby. He truly is one of the nicest and most professional people that I have ever met in the wrestling business. He was one of the first "high flyers" in the business and I had always respected the way he worked in the ring. Of

course I spoke to the other guys mentioned as well, but Mark Curtis was the one who really took a liking to me. He was a walking encyclopedia of wrestling knowledge, and he was most impressed that I had actually survived “The Malenko Camp.” Beginning on this day, my “tryout” match and every show that we did together thereafter, we would always do fifty to one hundred Hindu Squats together as a warm-up prior to the matches.

Cornette had been out of the room during this time when he suddenly stuck his head back in and asked me to step outside for a quick word about my upcoming match. I stepped out as Jimmy opened a restroom door that was off to the side of the curtain, but still out of sight of the fans who were beginning to pile into the arena.

He opened the door and there stood “Prime Time” Brian Lee. I reached out and introduced myself as Jimmy said, “Bobby, this is Brian Lee, and you two will be working together tonight.” I told him it was a pleasure to meet him and that I’d be glad to do whatever he wanted to do in the ring. That’s when Jimmy spoke up again and said, “Bobby, Brian was our first heavyweight champ and he’s currently the ‘Beat the Champ’ TV Champ, you don’t have a problem putting him over do you?” I looked at Brian and said, “Look at this guy, he’s six foot six and probably weighs around 280, hell no I have no problem, putting him over.” Brian kinda laughed and Jimmy just smiled. I then ask Brian what his finishing move was and if there was anything special that he wanted to do during the match.

“My finish is called ‘The Final Countdown,’ and it will be real easy to take. I basically will have you across my shoulder and then I drop down to my knee as I drop you off into the mat.” I told him that sounded simple enough and that I’d be glad to take his finish with no problem. I then thanked Jimmy for the opportunity and for the tryout. I told both men that I would do my best and that I was happy to be there and I asked Brian again if there was anything special he wanted to do during the match. His response surprised me, but showed just what a true professional he was. “You’re the heel, call it out there and we’ll have a good match.”

Once I got in the ring and locked up with big Brian Lee, he said, “Dickdrag me!” I almost started laughing, but he repeated it so I sunk in deep under his arm and arched back and gave him a picture perfect arm-

drag. “Again!” He stood up and complained to the ref that I had been pulling his hair to take him down. It was going to be a typical “old-school,” heel versus baby face match.

I then took over calling a good match and the only other thing that I recall Brian saying was, “I dare Cornette to give this guy a job,” and “Thank you” at the end when he pinned me. Pin me, pay me! I was happy as can be. It was like “having a night off” as the saying goes in the wrestling business when you work with someone who actually knows how to work and the match goes well. I’m still thankful to “Prime Time” Brian Lee to this day for not only what he did for me in the ring, selling his ass off for me, as I worked as the heel and he worked as the face. I was also grateful for what he did after the match. One, he thanked me in the ring, but more importantly, he immediately went back in the back to Cornette and told him to hire me and to find a spot on the roster for me. Jimmy thanked me and paid me. He told me that he would be in touch soon. It had taken nine months from the first few phone conversations and the one meeting that we had prior to my actual tryout, but man was it ever worth the wait.

The following month, Robert Gibson hurt his ankle during one of the matches in Pikeville, Kentucky, at “The Bluegrass Brawl” and SMW needed someone to come in and fill his spot on the upcoming shows. No, I didn’t become a member of the Rock-n-Roll Express, at least not on this tour, although a couple of years later Robert and I would team up quite often in a few tag-team matches. I also had the honor of being their partner on a bunch of six-man tag matches later on while in SMW. When Cornette brought me in for the weekend loop, Tim Horner moved up the card to team with Ricky Morton. I got to open several shows in the Kentucky area working with Dr. Tom Prichard in the opening matches. I also worked in the “Battle Royals” each of those nights as well.

It was an honor for me to get to work with Dr. Tom as Cornette managed him each night. I got to meet some more of the SMW guys who were on the roster and I was really excited to be a part of something that was just about to become huge.

After being in SMW for a few nights, Mark Curtis came to me and said, “What’s your finishing move?” I’m sure I looked dumbfounded as I

asked him what he meant, and why he wanted to know what I used as a finisher during my matches.

“Jimmy brought someone in to put you over tonight, and he wants to see you really do whatever you want in the match and to have a good match. They really like you here.”

They, of course being the office, and the boys.

“Um, really? Tell him that I have something in mind, but for tonight I’ll just use a drop kick from the top rope if that’s okay.”

Mark said he was sure that it would be fine and that I would be working with a guy by the name of Mike Sampson.

“Really? I know Mike. Tell him I said ‘hey,’ and I’ll call everything in the ring and right after I do the Russian Leg Sweep watch for the top rope drop kick, thanks.”

I couldn’t believe that the office was going to “put me over” and had actually brought in someone for me to work with, especially a guy like Mike that knows how to work. One more thing about this match that excited me, whether I was going over or not, was that it was in Paintsville, Kentucky. I had many family members who were going to be at the show. They’d not only get to see me in action, but they would also get a chance to see me win a match. “You bunch of marks!” I kid ya. I love my cousins and family from Paintsville. My family also got to see firsthand that all my hard work was paying off. I was getting the opportunity to live my dream of being a professional wrestler. It was a true blessing that Sandy Scott, Jim Cornette, and Tim Horner thought enough about me to give me a job after my tryout match. Now they were giving me a chance to “go over” on someone. They were also giving me the opportunity to come on board with SMW full-time. Things were panning out really well for me at this point in my wrestling career.

Victory, with referee Mark Curtis

As I mentioned, there were, “Battle Royals” at the end of a couple of the shows during my first loop with SMW, and on the second night one was scheduled. They were billed as “Special 12 Man, Over the Top Rope, Battle Royals.” Some of the guys that I recall were Dr. Tom, Ricky Morton, Tim Horner, Brian Lee, Jimmy Golden, Tony Anthony and “The Task Master” himself, Kevin Sullivan.

My respect for Kevin had dated back to when I first saw him work live on several shows when I was down in Florida. I didn’t actually know him back then, but I had seen him around and of course saw him on television for years. But, the one thing I remember was a shoot style interview, way before guys were doing shoot style interviews like they do today, and way before the internet was being used as a way to, in my opinion, only further expose the business.

Kevin was on a live WFLA radio talk show in the Tampa area, and he just spoke the truth about his career. Some of the things he said came through the radio as to just how much he loved the wrestling business and

just how much he had given to this great business. I had enjoyed that interview so much, because he didn't expose the business or break character, but just gave honest shoot-style answers about professional wrestling.

Anyway, as said, I had seen him wrestle live and on TV and saw him just beat the living crap out of people, and loved his vicious style. Oh, and those chops that I used to see him deliver on some of the guys he wrestled would probably leave welts and bruises on their chests for days. I just knew he wasn't holding anything back on those chops. While speaking of chops in the wrestling ring, no one should hold back. You really should just lay those suckers in there across the guy's chest. In addition to Sullivan's, the ones that Ronnie "Hands of Stone" Garvin, Greg "The Hammer" Valentine, Chris Benoit, The Stro, Roy Bass, and of course, "The Nature Boy" Ric Flair threw were some of the most vicious chops in pro wrestling.

Back to the Battle Royal story, on the night that all twelve men entered the ring, there's Kevin Sullivan. All I could see in my mind's eye was him coming across that ring and giving me a beat down and finishing me off with a series of chops before he throws me to the floor over the top rope.

Once the fight starts, as that's really all a battle royal is, an every man for himself fight, everything is going fine. Everyone is working together and no one has been tossed out of the ring as we all try to give the fans their money's worth, this being the main event for the evening. Then, just like I thought, here comes Kevin Sullivan and I am in a corner. He grabs me, and in a low voice he says, "I hear Larry trained you." I quietly spoke back a, "Yes sir." "Larry is a good guy and a good trainer. Put your hand on the top of my head." I then placed my hand on the top of his head as he guided himself towards the middle of the ring, and propelled himself over the top rope. I couldn't believe it. He was the first man out and I had eliminated him.

Well, not exactly, he was respectful, and professional enough to give this kid a break as he eliminated himself. As he hits the floor, he turns and flips me the bird and says, "I'll get you back Bobby Blaze," with Ref Mark Curtis trying to restrain him and make him go to the back as he was out of the battle royal.

I don’t recall who went over that night, and that’s not even important to me. What is important to me is to have been respected by a man that I respect, especially a man like Kevin Sullivan. I had the utmost respect for him before then and still to this day. While mentioning Kevin, I would also like to say that he was instrumental during my stay in not only SMW, but also while I was in WCW.

I have nothing but respect for Terry Taylor, who placed the call to me for my future try-out with WCW, Arn Anderson, Jimmy Hart and those that helped me out while I was in WCW, but also to Kevin Sullivan, because before I even tried out for them, he told me in Knoxville, Tennessee, shortly after SMW had shut down, that if I wanted a job in WCW, “You got one.”

I didn’t go to WCW at first when SMW shut down, as they didn’t have a lot of guys on contract then and most of the boys there were only getting a nightly pay and or doing a few jobs on TV. Nevertheless, Kevin had told me that if I wanted to come in I could. One of the reasons that I didn’t initially begin working for WCW was because I was making good money working several nights per week still being fresh off SMW TV and I had a deal worked out to go to Japan in a few short months. I did speak to Paul Orndorff, as Kevin had instructed me to do, but the timing wasn’t right.

Paul also was a man that I had nothing but respect for and he understood my reasons for not starting with WCW at that point. Not to be redundant, but Kevin Sullivan, Terry Taylor, Arn Anderson, Jimmy Hart, and Paul Orndorff were all a part of my eventual contract with WCW, and they all also helped keep me there. These were men I respected and I know they respected my work. That was important to me, and should be to anyone, to have the respect of the men who helped put you in good matches and appreciated it when you went to the ring and gave not only the fans, but your opponent, and your bosses a good solid match. Thank you, gentlemen. There’s more to follow when you get to the chapter about my days in WCW.

Shortly after a couple of SMW TV tapings, Cornette came to me with a booking sheet that had about twelve to fifteen bookings for me. He also asked me if I had any more colorful wrestling gear than the traditional black wrestling tights and black boots that I had been wearing out of respect for

Malenko and the “old school” style of wrestling gear that other greats had been wearing for years. He also mentioned some ideas that he was kicking around in his head, and those who know Cornette know that he has a great mind for the wrestling business.

I told him that I had some tights with BLAZE across the backside, and covered in flames. I also had some neat kick pads covered in flames that I had wanted to wear but wanted to make sure that he would be cool with them. On the next week of bookings I showed Jimmy what I had and he said he loved them and to start wearing them as he had some plans for me in the near future. During this time I got to work with truly talented guys that were coming in and out of SMW. I worked with Taz while he was still working for ECW and finishing up with SMW.

I also had the privilege of working with Bobby Eaton, Tim Horner in a face verses face match, “The Dirty White Boy” Tony Anthony, “Killer” Mark Kyle and a then unknown “Dark Secret,” who was none other than a young Brian Armstrong, who went on to WWF fame as, “The Road Dog,” and a huge part of “DX”, Generation X. Let me just say, besides the guys who were a regular part of the SMW crew in those early days, Cornette brought in many other talented and well known and respected guys to work on the shows. When I first started full time in the SMW territory, in addition to the names listed above, Robert Gibson and Ricky Morton had been reunited as The Rock-n-Roll Express, The Midnight Express with Stan Lane and Bobby Eaton were also still there at this time. “Bullet” Bob, Scott, and Steve Armstrong, and Tracy Smothers were all a part of this crew. I was honored to be working night in and night out with all these guys on a regular basis.

There were other guys that SMW brought in to do TV tapings and most of them were talented and worked hard. Unlike what was happening in the WWF and WCW at the time, where they used “jobbers” SMW used guys in somewhat competitive matches and paid them decent money to appear on their TV programs.

Tracy Smothers, Bobby Blaze, Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson

By the way, yes, I had done a few "jobs" for the old WWF and was paid well. I got to work with top stars such as "Rowdy" Roddy Piper, Tito Santana, and "IRS" Mike Rotunda. I take no shame in having done this, as many guys have done it and gone on to become big stars in the wrestling business. Plus, in addition to getting paid well, and getting TV exposure, I considered it all part of "paying my dues." There were several guys who used to do the SMW tapings that went on to be big stars in WWF and WCW.

The only word that I think I hate more than "sports entertainment" is 'jobber.' We all have jobs to do, and we all have to start somewhere. I just find it somewhat disrespectful to the guy that is doing his job by putting someone over being called a 'jobber.' I prefer calling it "talent enhancement," or being a "carpenter" as there's no job you can't nail down. Your job for the show this evening is to help enhance your opponent, by making him look good or maybe even make him look better than what he actually is. Hell, Terry Funk dedicated his book *More Than Just Hardcore*,

“to the jobbers,” and in his words, “the wrestlers who have put their shoulders to the mat, purposely and selflessly, to enhance other wrestlers in the fans’ eyes.” If my favorite wrestler of all time said it then by-god it must be true.

In SMW, as said, I was glad to be a part of something that was about to hit it big and to become mainstream in the wrestling industry. “Smoky Mountain Wrestling! Wrestling the way you remember it! Wrestling the way it should be!”

My first program was going to be with Tony Anthony, “The Dirty White Boy.” I first “upset” Tony when he took me a little too lightly during a TV “Beat the Champ” match to win my first TV title. The idea was that this upset Tony so much that he would do anything he could to beat and humiliate me. We had almost three months of matches where Tony could pin me during a match and he would pin me as many times as he could during a match, but I still would not quit. Even after all the beatings he gave me in the ring and all the pins I took from him, I never did quit during any of those matches.

I was “The No-Quit Kid!” This of course pissed Tony off even more. The fans loved the fact that not only was I not a quitter, but that I was from the same area where our fan base was located and many of them could relate to me. They were seeing first hand that I was willing to fight Tony or anyone else in SMW and wouldn’t back down. The angle helped get me over huge with the SMW fans. I also actually spoke like a lot of them with my Southern accent. I was loving every minute of having a full time job in the wrestling business and I was treated with respect from the office, the boys, and the fans. Cornette, along with Sandy Scott, Tim Horner, and with some input from the boys including Mark Curtis, really liked me there and had plans for my career with the company.

Sure enough, somewhere inside Cornette’s head he had a plan for me and for my career. As my angle with Tony was finishing up, Jimmy came to me and said that he was bringing in a young guy by the name of Chris Candido and I was going to be involved in his first program once he came into the territory. I would personally like to take this time to thank all the people who helped me in one way or another while I was with SMW.

Jimmy, Sandy, Tim, Mark, and all the boys that were regulars. Thanks also goes out to all the guys that came in and helped put me and get me over on TV. Also thanks to all the dedicated SMW fans. Thank you!

Prior to Chris's arrival in SMW and before our program was to begin, I got to work with "Killer" Mark Kyle. Once again I found myself back in Beckley, West Virginia, and across the ring from me was Big Mark. I had seen many of his matches and knew that he could work. I never actually had the time to speak to him prior to the match, which wouldn't be a problem as we both knew how to wrestle and how to work. He had just finished up a tour of Japan when I first started with SMW, so in the ring we go, and since I was going over, I started to call the match, or so I thought. As soon as I spoke during the lock-up, all I heard from this 6-3 300 pound bruiser was, "Shut Up! Just shut up and listen kid." I really hadn't given much thought to the idea that Jimmy had turned me into a baby face once I was hired on. At this point in wrestling, the "heels" always called the matches and Mark was just doing his job, being a heel. That's the way it was, and that's the way it should be.

He called us a good 'house show' match. At one point he tossed me outside the ring. Then he followed me outside of the ring and picked me up and rammed my back into the metal ring post. His hand was over my lower back, and I could feel him protecting me as he continued to beat me down. Once he felt it was time for me to get back in the ring, as I slowly climbed up towards the apron to crawl back in, he grabbed me.

It seems he had other ideas about putting my butt back into the ring. You have to really appreciate just how strong of a guy Mark was and I was just about to find out firsthand about his strength. From outside the ring he lifted me over his head into a full body press, then he stepped closer to the ring. I thought he might push me through the second rope, but he hadn't lowered my body any as he approached the ring, so I reached for the top rope. My thinking was I better protect myself if he drops me. Well, he didn't drop me, he tossed me all the way over the top rope and into the dead middle of the ring. I couldn't believe how far he had thrown me. I landed perfectly and sold the bump and waited for him to get back in the ring. He mumbled something about, "You alright? Time for your comeback." Then

he set me up in a way for me to make an effort to come back in that old-school old-fashioned baby face style and finally, when he missed his next big move, I made my comeback and he took the pin. “Thank you, bro” was all I could say, as I couldn’t believe that he had not only called such a good match, but had also taken such good care of me throughout the entire match.

Later in the back, I made my way to the heel locker room as quickly as I could to not only thank him, but to personally introduce myself to him and just to b.s. a little with him. I found out that he was a great guy and was easy to get along with, needless to say, we became friends instantly. I know that may sound weird, for a guy who I had never met, and had only seen wrestle on a few shows that gave us no time to personally introduce ourselves prior to meeting in the ring, to become friends. This man just beat the crap out of me during the match, yet he was a complete gentleman as soon as we began speaking. I really enjoyed my friendship with “Killer” Kyle. This was my first match with him, but it wasn’t the last, as we went on to have many good matches on house shows and on television.

Mark Kyle was a super good guy outside the ring once I got to know him even better. Here are a just a few highlights of just a couple of matches that we had through the years. One night we were doing a dark match prior to a SMW TV taping. We only had to get about five minutes in of actual ring action with a typical good guy, bad guy match to pop the crowd a bit and just warm them up for the three hour taping. We would also both have to wrestle later on in our respective programs during the actual tapings.

On another night Kyle and myself were scheduled to do a five minute opening match prior to the beginning of a TV taping. Kyle was back to being Cornette’s “bodyguard” at this point and I was involved with Buddy Landel. One match would be against someone like Larry Santos or Mike Sampson who would help me get over then I’d actually have to work with Buddy in the last hour in the semi or main event to set up the next month of house shows. Anyway, Kyle and I, at this point, after having worked together in so many matches didn’t even have to speak, and after all we only had five minutes, so we could work it out and call it in the ring. We started working and five minutes went by like nothing while I was in there

with a guy who can work and knows what's going on. We heard the ring announcer call out the five minute mark, but Mark Curtis still hadn't given us the cue to go home.

Finally somewhere around eight to ten minutes in, Curtis says, "Keep going, they are having trouble with getting the lights right to go for the live TV." We just keep working, back and forth Kyle getting some heat, giving me hope spots to keep me alive, and we just keep working. "Ten minutes gone," says the announcer, so we just keep going. A few minutes later, we get our cue, and we "take it home," when out of nowhere I use my "Northern Lights Suplex," my finisher to pin "Killer."

"Ladies and gentlemen, your winner in thirteen minutes and fifty-eight seconds, Bobby Blaze."

We had taken something that was supposed to be small and turned it into one heck of a match that lasted almost fourteen minutes. This may seem insignificant since Kyle and I would easily go 15-20 minutes on a regular basis on house shows, but we helped bring the crowd alive for a TV taping in a match that was only scheduled for five. He was just a true professional and we just knew how to keep working in order to give the technicians enough time to get the lights right to go live.

Doing a fifteen minute match isn't so hard to do, but again, it has to be with the right person. I had been doing twenty and thirty minute matches back when I was up in Canada. It really wasn't the fact that we got the match off, it was just that Cornette had enough faith in us to just let us handle it without having to come up with another dark match prior to TV.

One night, on a house show for an independent promoter out of Tennessee, Kyle and I did a sixty minute match. We were both still working and appearing on SMW TV, but we had taken an indie booking on a night off. The guy said he just wanted to watch us work, so we went out there and worked the entire last hour of the show. Now, we aren't talking about Ric Flair and Harley Race or a Flair versus Ricky Morton match from back in the day, but we did the entire hour. I know there are many more examples of back when guys like Dory Funk Jr, Terry Funk, Nick Bockwinkle, and many others could and would go on for a full sixty minutes on a nightly

basis, but again, Kyle was so easy for me to work with that we just went out and worked our asses off. The crowd, the boys in the back, and the promoter loved it and I know I enjoyed every second of that hour.

Kyle and I were also involved in a riot that took place in Virginia. We had worked the opening match and The Heavenly Bodies, Jimmy Del Ray and Tom Prichard were in the main event that night against The Rock-n-Roll Express. Well, Cornette and a fan got into an argument, yeah, I know, imagine that, and let's just say all hell broke loose when the guy left only to return with a gun and several friends.

The Harris Brothers, Brian Lee, Candido, and The Dirty White Boy along with Kyle were all in the heel locker room that night. Myself and Tracy Smothers and several other baby faces were in our locker room when the chaos began. We soon joined forces with our fellow wrestlers and brothers in the small town college gym. Chairs and bodies were flying everywhere. As things smoothed out the person standing behind me, standing back to back was none other than Kyle. We may have battled each other as opponents in the ring earlier that night, but by-god we had each others' backs when push came to shove in this all out riot. When it was all said and done, the police had every wrestler go into the heel locker room prior to leaving as they cleared out the fans. The guy may have had a gun and a few friends, but little did they know, myself and three other wrestlers also had guns on us as we were escorted out of the building. It could have turned deadly had the police not shown up. There were thirteen police cars from five towns and counties that personally escorted all the wrestlers' cars to the county line. In my case we were close to the Kentucky border and my escort followed me until I was in the clear. Classic Cornette as usual in getting so much heat that it caused a riot, but a class act by Kyle as he had my back throughout the entire ordeal. And the show must go on.

One last quick story about Kyle and myself: This came towards the end of his SMW run when he was getting ready to be released for awhile to head for Atlanta for WCW where he'd start doing a lot of their TV tapings when they needed enhancement talent. He was going to be accepting fewer bookings per month, but he would be making more money nightly and would only have to report to Orlando for ten to twelve days per month. In

fact once I later signed with WCW, I would stay with and share hotel and rent and car expenses with him on several occasions, but that was still a few years away for me. I was having too much fun and having too many good matches in SMW as Jimmy kept me in pretty good programs and kept me strong on TV.

On the last night that Kyle was to appear on SMW TV he was scheduled to "put me over" in the middle of the ring using my Northern Lights Suplex. I really didn't want to beat him outright as I wanted him to stay strong, just out of respect for him, but Kyle had other ideas. He told me to take the entire match and just beat him and stay on him until the finish.

"Mark, let's just work man. We only have about seven minutes to get in plus there's music and we can just go back and forth until the finish. Besides, I really don't want to beat you with the Northern Lights. Let me just 'small package' you or something simple."

"Smedley!" - Mark Kyle and Mark Curtis were the only two guys that ever called me by or used my real name in and around the wrestling business. I don't know why, but I really kind of enjoyed hearing them call me that, and using my real name. I'd like to think it was out of respect for the friendships that we shared in the locker rooms, and the fact that they actually had become my friends outside the ring.

"Smedley! You go to that ring, and you stay on me and don't let up. Then, right in the middle of the ring, you do your Northern Lights and you pin me 1,2,3!"

I started to protest, but he continued, "I swear if you don't stay on me and then pin me right in the middle of the ring, I'll beat the shit out of you. Do you understand?"

So, let's get this right I said to myself as I thought, I've never heard Kyle curse before in the three years that I had known him, he's 6-3 and weighs 320, and he probably would just beat me and toss me around like a rag doll if I don't do what he says, so I better do it. "Are you sure?" I asked one more time before he just nodded to me and said thanks. Sure enough we went to the ring and I just stayed on him the entire match and then pinned

him after my big move right in the middle of the ring. See, it was more important for Kyle to put me over, and make me look strong and stay strong by doing what he did than it was for him to have to look good prior to his departure to WCW. He knew that I still had a good run going in SMW and he was only going to Atlanta because the money was better for him and that he would be putting guys over on a nightly basis anyway. He knew that he was doing me a huge favor by making the sacrifice to put me over strong. As said, he was a great guy and a good person, and he had become a friend to me. It was more important to him to put me first instead of himself and work for my long-term program and not his ego or his glory. Thanks Mark for being a friend and a professional.

It's a Work!!!

Johnson City, Tennessee was always one of my favorite towns to work in Smoky Mountain Wrestling and I always enjoyed Freedom Hall there. They always had great crowds and the wrestling fans there were always fun to talk to before the shows. When the shows started, they really were there to witness the mat action.

The back of the arena is rather large as you walk through the back doors. There's an old wooden crate that says, "Aerosmith" on it. It was left here by the crew when the band was in town and shot the "Love in an Elevator" music video right there in the building. Ricky Morton's girlfriend, Andrea was in the video. What a cool experience, uh?

I was on my way to the toilet area to take a whiz and as I approached the stall I noticed someone had followed me into the restroom. "Um, hey Bobby, you got a minute?" I heard as I turned looking over my shoulder to see Jim Cornette standing there.

"Yeah Jim, what's up?" I said as I began to take my piss and thought this was weird, but then again the whole damn wrestling business is weird, so why let this moment interrupt my piss.

"Hey Bobby, great news! I just got you booked next month in Charlotte against Dan Severn. Isn't that great?"

Now if you have ever tried to stop pissing in mid-stream, you know how difficult that can be. Well, I stopped, dead dry, no leaks, no drops, stopped pissing in mid-stream.

“What? Do I owe you money or something?” I turned towards Jim, literally with my dick in my hand. “What did you say? You know this guy just won the UFC last night don’t ya?”

I had heard earlier that Dan “The Beast” Severn won his first Ultimate Fighting Championship the night before and. unless you live in a cave you probably know what UFC is all about. Dan had been an All-American collegiate wrestler and an alternate on the US Olympic team as well as proving himself to be one tough SOB in the octagon.

I stood looking and listening, as best one can while holding their dick, as Jim continued, “I know, it’ll be a great draw to add to the ‘Carolina Memories Tour’ coming up. It’ll be a good solid match. Listen Bobby, you’re the only one here that I know who can get in the ring and wrestle with this guy.”

Thinking to myself, as I turned back towards the stall, this guy is the one who’s doing the pissing. He’s pissing up my leg and telling me it’s fuckin’ raining.

“Jim, does he know this is a work? I mean this match is going to be for business isn’t it?”

“Oh yeah, he’s been working out some with Al Snow, and Al’s teaching him the pro style.”

“But he does know this is a work right?”

“Yeah, yeah, it’ll be easy.”

I turn and try to relieve myself, feeling as if The Beast has a choke hold on my cock. I begin to squeeze and find some comfort as I look over my shoulder.

“Jim, since this is business, and you say that I’m the guy you want working with Severn, I guess there’s going to be a little something extra for me, won’t there?”

“Oh yeah, I’ll take care of you. They’ll be a little something extra for you. I think you’ll have a helluva a good match. It should be good.”

Washing my hands and drying them quickly, I reiterate as I turn to shake Corny’s hand, “He knows it’s a work, right?”

We shake hands as we exit back into the locker room area with the rest of “the boys.” Some are talking to each other, while most are just minding their own business as they get ready for tonight’s show.

“Fuck me!” I think to myself as I walk over to my gym bag. “This has got to be a fuckin’ joke.”

The next month goes by quicker than a “squash” match. There’s very little said about the Severn match except a few words of encouragement every now and then from referee Mark Curtis and couple of the Armstrong boys. I just continue to train at the gym and begin to try to work a little more “snug” in my matches each night.

Walking into the Grady Cole Center in Charlotte, North Carolina six weeks later I feel as if this is a true dream come true. Charlotte was the “hotbed” of the old NWA, National Wrestling Alliance, back in the days of my youth and I had seen so many great matches on television over the years from Charlotte. This is Ric Flair country! This is professional wrestling country! I walked towards the back of the arena to the locker room area hoping to speak with Cornette before the match.

I wonder if I will win this match tonight. “Hey, don’t you determine the winners and losers of wrestling matches by flipping a coin?” God, I couldn’t tell you how many times I’ve been asked that question. Who in their right mind would really believe that? I just hope Severn has a two headed coin and both sides say, “In a Work We Trust.”

I see Dan Severn engaged in a conversation as I look over towards the stage area that is directly up a few steps from the locker room area. He looks like he's in really good shape physically and he looks a lot bigger than what I had expected and what I had seen on TV. Among the most noticeable things were his legs, which are as thick as an oak and look strong and powerful. I can tell right now as I approach the conversation, this is going to be a long night.

I'm not so sure that Cornette isn't just now telling him that this is a business and that our match is "a work." I smile as I greet both men and introduce myself to Severn. "That damn Jimmy," I think to myself, "He's just now telling this fucker what's going on, telling me that I'm the only guy on the SMW roster that can 'work' with Dan. I know for dammed sure that Steve Armstrong and Tracy Smothers both could have easily 'worked' a match with this guy. They are both really good wrestlers and workers who know how to take care of themselves, as well as perform…"

"Bobby, this is Dan Severn," as I reach out my hand and snap back into reality Cornette asks me, "You don't mind putting Dan over do ya?" Put him over? Put him over? "Do I have a choice?" I ask as I try to amuse myself and make light of the situation. "Um, yeah, that's no problem what-so-ever man. Be glad to." I just stand there and wonder where the hell that coin toss took place because I'd like to see it. It did have two heads, and both sides were encrypted with a detailed engraving of my ass getting kicked.

Coin tosses my ass. Really? I ease myself into the conversation as I begin to let "The Beast," who is, by the way, a complete gentleman outside the ring, know that I am more than willing to go in the ring and "put him over" so long as all my limbs stay intact. We quickly discuss a few ideas before I tell him I have to sell a few gimmicks at the gimmick table because, "The Gimmick Wars" have already begun, and it looks like I might need the extra money for a quick trip to the hospital after this match.

Later as I approached the ring to face the "The Beast," I wasn't sure what the fans expected, but I did know what I expected. The match would go exactly the way it did. It would be a hard fought contest that really didn't have any guidelines. After a quick suplex that launched me from one side of

the ring and almost through the other side of the ropes, I knew the shit was on. As I made my way to a corner in hopes of recovering, I glanced up just in time to see two big thick tree trunk legs running at me. “Damn, doesn’t this guy know it’s a work?” I grip a leg and we make our way into the middle of the ring before I am tossed off like a rag doll and once again only see the lights briefly before hitting the mat. Again, I shoot in and grab a leg, but being an amateur wrestler, Severn is already countering my move and all I have is both my arms wrapped around his thick leg. About this time I hear a fan scream, “Knee to the face, knee to the face!” And sure enough Severn must have forgotten our alleged agreement and had a quick flash back into the octagon, as I can only see and feel his leg pulling back as if he is about to plant a knee right in my face. I slide out of the ring quickly, hearing a few cries of boo coming from the irate crowd. They must have thought they were either going to see an all out shoot match or a UFC type fight. “I’m not here to entertain you people!” I yell. “I’m here trying to win a match!” This seems to calm them down and gets some quick needed attention and comic relief. “Okay, big man, the shit is on now, motherfucker, let’s make this thing work,” I think to myself as I crawl back into the ring. Now that Severn has realized that he is a little too aggressive, and a little too quick to counter my every move, he has slowed down just a bit. I, on the other hand have become more aggressive and let him know, “If you’re here to work, then let’s work!” After a few stalemate holds and me once blocking a Japanese Arm Bar, and once getting to the ropes on the second one, I tap out and submit to the third one.

That’s right; I tapped out right in the middle of the ring to a true submission hold, a Japanese Arm Bar right in the middle of the ring. And as my good arm was being raised by Severn himself after receiving the N.W.A. title the fans screamed and cheered at the awesome display of the match that just took place.

It was a gentlemen’s agreement. I would put Severn over in the middle of the ring. No problem for me, because if this hadn’t been about an 80% shoot, I would have tapped out in about the first thirty seconds and nobody would have enjoyed the match, especially me.

As for the agreement between me and Cornette, he was a man of his word. I opened my envelope with my pay in it and there it was, an extra twenty dollars as a bonus. “Can you believe this business? Can you believe this shit? God-Damn! This is one crazy business,” I think to myself as I dress to go meet the press and have dinner with who else, but Severn himself. As said, he was a complete gentleman outside the ring, and this is one crazy business. Maybe next time I will ask him and the promoter if we can’t just flip a coin.

George in Pittsburgh

During my time in SMW, we could also take bookings on independent shows as long as it didn’t interfere with our SMW schedules and made sure that Jim was cool with it first. I was staying pretty busy working on a lot of independent shows and I was very fortunate that SMW had been on satellite television. Also, because SMW promoted “Old School” wrestling, there were indie guys that promoted shows catering to the fans of this type of wrestling. Old School wrestling is just pure wrestling where there’s one good guy or “baby face” going against the bad guy or the “heel” and the match just flows. It’s just a wrestling match that really gets the fans involved where there’s a clear cut good guy versus bad guy match. Many may say “old school,” or “new school,” but really there’s a just “the right way.” Work!

One time I was booked in Pittsburgh and the promoter asked me if I had anyone that I could bring along to work with. After thinking for a second I knew I would love to get Killer Mark Kyle booked with me, but I also knew he was already booked down in Tennessee. The next name that came to mind was Gorgeous George III. I always had really exciting matches with both of these opponents and knew that the promoter would be pleased with either. I told him all about George and got him booked.

On the day before the show George arrived at my home in Kentucky. He had just driven up from North Carolina and from Kentucky we would make a five and a half hour trip to Pittsburgh. Here’s a great example of just how much some wrestlers will go through just to “make a town.” George

had driven ten hours to my house, stayed all night, and then we still had another five or six hours to go. I know all about countless hours spent in a car, bus, or plane, and the rigors of travel and life on the road.

George and I had worked several times back in my days at SMW. He was a real good amateur wrestler and had an excellent wrestling background in his professional training. I always liked working with him, although at times, he seemed to think he was going to win every single match. The matches were tough and worked as if he were on his way to the state title or on a vision quest of sorts. I didn't care as long as he understood that the promotion that I had him booked in wanted an old school type of wrestling match.

We drove all the way to Beaver Community College in Pennsylvania in the same car. We got into the building an hour early as required on most shows. I needed to stretch and do some Hindu squats and push-ups before the match, but in the gym there was actually a weight room and exercise area. Perfect. I went in and started working out with George, and as we worked out we talked about our up-coming match, then went our separate ways to opposite gymnasium locker rooms. This should be a good night for the fans and I should have a really good match. Alright!

Now, George and I had traveled, talked, and even worked out together. We had spoken about how the match should go. Everything was ready to be put into motion as soon as the matches began. There were probably a little over 1,200 wrestling fans in the building. The show was a benefit show for the Special Olympics. I loved doing anything involving the Special Olympics. I had been a big brother to a Special Olympics child for a day my senior year of high school and I had played in a benefit basketball game against a professional football team, The Cincinnati Bengals, to help raise money for the Special Olympics. Now here I was on a professional wrestling show raising awareness and money for the Special Olympics again, so, needless to say I was happy that they had so many fans in the building that night. After speaking with the booker I relayed the message to George, "Just listen to me, and I'll put you over in the finish." In a perfect world, that is quite simple in our business. I am going to go out, work the

match with you, and then in the end, I will in some way mess up and let you pin me. Very simple terms, just listen!

"Next cartoon," I think to myself as I head into the ring to face "The Gorgeous One." Listening to the fans cheering in this college gymnasium is really an awesome feeling. Not only are they supporting a worthy cause, they are getting their money's worth tonight. "Not a bad crowd." I think as I await my opponent.

"Ladies and Gentlemen…" And then it's on. This fuckin' goof is all over me. He has totally flipped out. "What the fuck? Do I owe you money or something?" Gasping I reach my hand through the beefy arm that's around my neck like a python that hasn't eaten in months. "God dammit! What the fuck are you doing?" Gasping! Quietly slipping into unconsciousness, I think and think fast, get the hell out of this hold as I try to escape. Then, just in time I realize that he has let me up and is ready to attack again. "Son of a bitch, again?" Out of nowhere comes a quick clothesline and once again I'm in a rear naked choke and gasping for air.

The match continued and the fans were surprised as George won over the fan favorite. Pin me, pay me, I'm glad this match is over. There were a lot of boos and hisses, as the flamboyant wrestler made his way to the announcers table and said, "Ooh la la!" This was his signature sign off to the fans. By the time I had gained my wits and was done trying to convince the referee to no avail that George had his feet on the ropes when he pinned me, I realized that this was also a title match and he was now the champion for this organization.

Oh well. "Fuck it!" I thought as I made my way to the autograph table. Let the gimmick wars begin! It's time to sell those pictures, tee-shirts, hats, and give the fans an opportunity to have their picture taken with you. If you have a good match, get over with the fans, and lose convincingly because the heel cheated or screwed you out of a win, your gimmicks will still sell. Hell, sometimes you sell more when you lose a match because the fans know you got screwed over and you have not only their support, but their sympathy as well.

I learned a lot about selling in the ring from watching and listening to Ricky Morton. Ricky sells better than anyone in wrestling. Ricky and Robert did and still do huge business at the gimmick tables. Even when the Rock-n-Roll Express lose a match, even title matches, they still sold gimmicks. They also still had their fans support. Ricky had told me while we were together in SMW, “Get the fans sympathy Bobby. Get them to believe in you. When you’re selling and getting beat down, give them that belief that you still have a chance to come back and win, but get their sympathy while you’re taking that beating during the heat.”

I later collected payoffs for the both of us. I was also informed by the promoter that he had managers that were to do the talking on the shows. He did not want George to talk, “I’m paying him to wrestle, not talk.” No problem from me. I thought, “Hell I just want him to wrestle too.”

George and I later shared a meal and a hotel room and we talked a little as I had a few beers and watched a movie. I was still trying to figure out what happened in the ring. I had seen this guy work many times in the past, but I also had heard a couple of the guys talking about how they had to fight back against him and the only thing that went smooth was the finish. This made sense to me for some reason. He didn’t know how to actually “work” the in between wrestling, but knew that the promoter or booker had told him to win or lose on any given night. It reminded me of when I had first broken in, but wasn’t really smartened up. I knew that there was going to be a winner and a loser at the end of the match, it was all the stuff in between that I wasn’t so sure about early on. It seemed, my friend George, was kind of in that same mindset. I sincerely mean this as no disrespect towards him, as I have tons of respect for him, he just didn’t know any better, yet.

Now, for the record; this guy George was a very talented guy. He had worked in Puerto Rico, SMW and for the old Memphis office. The more we talked the more it made sense to me. He was uncertain of just how much talent he had. He had been given tryout matches with both the WWF and WCW, two of the largest wrestling companies in the world at the time. After he told me how those matches went. I understood. He really just liked beating people up in the ring and, mind you, he was good enough and tough

enough that he could. Finally I explained to him that this is a “work.” Everything is a work as Malenko would often tell me. I explained that he was good or he wouldn’t have had tryouts, I tried to reason with him that he should relax just a little bit and maybe try not to work so robotic in guiding his opponent around the ring. He needed to just let the other guy go with the flow and he needed to “listen” to the “worker” that was actually calling the match. I told him that on the next night, he should just listen to me, and when he got his arm raised in the next town after again winning by putting his feet on the ropes, to just stand in the middle of the ring. No need to talk, the “heel” cheating to win was enough “heat” to easily pop the crowd.

The next day I continued my talk with him as he drove us towards Johnstown, Pennsylvania. I would later work in the old arena where they shot the movie *Slap Shot*. This was an awesome building that you could just tell had a lot of sports history to it. Anyway, George listened intensely for most of the trip and after I was done talking with him and explaining the “work” to him, he simply turned to me and said, “You know, Tommy Rich told me that once.” What the fuck? I came unglued and started asking why it hadn’t set in with him and if he was willing to just try to listen to me later that night and try to actually work a match. This guy just didn’t get it, but I think he saw a light come on that day on our ride.

Later that evening in the third match, George really and truly became a professional. The match went smoothly and the entire thing was like a “night off” in the ring with him. He understood. He got it. Yes! After the show, the promoter thanked us both and told George that we had a great old school match and he would like to book him again in the future. I gave him a big hug and thanked him. “See what I mean,” I said to him when we were alone. “This how simple this business is my friend. We are just telling a story out there. You’re the bad guy, I’m the good guy, you cheat to win, and that’s how you got the reaction you did when you held the title up after the screw job finish.”

George later became known as The Maestro in the WCW. He had a sweet deal and a sweet gimmick too. He got to come down from the building rafters playing a piano, ala, Liberace. He had a good run on national television and actually landed a few acting jobs as well. George

later came back to work for me in the old CPW that I had invested in with him and Classy Roy Bass. The first night we worked together, several years after his big run, was one of the easiest nights I ever had in the ring. He was a true professional on each of the three nights we worked. He “put me over” every night and the fans loved me, but they loved to hate him even more. He had learned how to work his gimmick and how to work the fans. The Stro as he is now known is a friend of mine and I am proud to have been a big part of his success. It’s a work bro! And I’m glad, especially when facing someone as tough and talented as The Stro!

Dory and Terry Funk

In addition to all the regular guys that worked for SMW, Cornette would also bring in some of the top stars working for either one of the big companies or maybe in between contracts working on the independent scene. As mentioned he brought in Severn from the UFC. Kevin Sullivan and Bobby Eaton would return at times, and he brought in Shawn Michaels and other guys from the WWF. I can still remember when The Undertaker was brought in for a weekend of shows and popped our houses big time There’s probably way too many guys to mention who came through and worked for a loop or a couple weeks like, Captain Redneck Dick Murdock, Bob Orton Jr, and one of my all time favorites Terry Funk.

Before I had the chance to meet Terry, I had the honor of meeting his legendary brother Dory Funk Jr. I was scheduled to wrestle in Marietta, Georgia, for a big show, and as usual, I arrived at the building early to do my exercises, run, or just to get in the ring and stretch. I was scheduled to wrestle Sean Waltman, aka, “The 1,2,3 Kid,” during his first run in WWF. The show was actually a co-show, in which the WWF had sent in some of their guys to work with the guys from SMW. It was a great event that was stacked with good matches, and talented workers booked on it from top to bottom. It’s really too bad that more wrestling companies don’t do this in the US more often, especially nowadays. In Japan, some of the companies share talent on a regular basis, and this gives many fans a chance to see some truly great wrestling shows. It was while I was in the ring stretching, that I noticed a guy looking on. He was tall and wearing a cowboy hat and

he looked very familiar to me. At first I didn't give it much thought and continued to stretch. It was one of those times, when you think you know someone, you do a double take, and then it just hits you like a ton of bricks that you do remember or know who it is. Mark Curtis walked over by the ring and was speaking to me as there really wasn't anyone else, other than the ring crew in the building at this time. We spoke a few minutes as I continued to stretch and then I said, "I think I know that guy over there, but I just can't put my finger on who it is from here."

As soon as Mark said, "Bobby, that's," I interrupted him and said, "Ah man, that's Dory Funk, Jr." I immediately got up, got out of the ring and went right to where Dory was standing. "Hello sir, I'm Bobby Blaze," I spoke as I reached out to shake the former NWA World Heavyweight Champ's hand. I couldn't believe I was meeting one of the all time greats in the world of professional wrestling. To me, The Funk Family was like meeting wrestling royalty.

"Hi Bobby, nice to meet you. I've heard good things about you. This is my wife Marti."

I shook her hand as well. It was beyond belief that Dory Funk Jr. and his wife were at an SMW show and I was greatly honored to meet him. The Funk family is one of the best known wrestling families in all of professional wrestling. Dory Jr held the National Wrestling Alliance, NWA, Heavyweight Championship title for over three years. Terry Funk would later hold this same title and carry the strap for close to a year and a half.

Dory and Marti ended up coming to several SMW events and it was always a pleasure to see and speak with them both. I certainly have a lot of respect for Dory and what he and his family have done for the sport of professional wrestling. Thanks Dory for being a gentleman, a man of respect, and a true champion. The honor was all mine.

My biggest surprise while in SMW was yet to come. That was still a few months away from the meeting with Dory. I had been off TV for a few weeks and only caught the show if I was in a spot town working for other independent promoters, or if Cornette had booked me on a local show that wasn't going to be televised.

I wasn't out of the loop as to what was happening completely, but I wasn't there every week like I had been for the last couple of years. I knew some of the things that were going on within the company, and as I said, I'd been watching some of the shows. It was while watching our SMW program one Saturday morning from a hotel in Johnson City, Tennessee that I heard the voice, and saw the man, Terry Funk himself doing a promo about coming into SMW and taking care of, "Bullet" Bob Armstrong. I couldn't believe it, Terry Fucking Funk! OK, I know that's not his middle name, but damn, Terry Fuckin' Funk! I popped big time to say the least. The Funker started talking about Bob Armstrong's family, his wife, his kids, his 'mistress' and how Armstrong wouldn't fight him. It's a great promo and I highly recommend looking it up if you've never seen it. The way The Funker delivered his words and the way he emphasized certain words during the promo would surely fire "The Bullet" up to have the guts to come meet and fight him when Funk came to SMW. Classic! Terry Funk was the man. I believed everything he said in any of his interviews that I ever heard through the years. He, to me, made me believe in professional wrestling. Funk was the best for getting over the "suspension of disbelief" for me, as a young fan, and as a performer/wrestler. If I ever had a wrestling idol, it was Terry Funk.

So anyway, Funk comes in to work a few dates for SMW and of course he's in the main events against "Bullet" Bob. One of the high spots of my career was about to take place on this night and I didn't even know it.

I had worked on the under card on the show but was scheduled to also do a, "run-in" with some of the other baby faces at the finish of the main event. Peering through the curtain, watching these two wrestling greats was exciting to say the least. It was a good match, plenty of action, good heat, and the fans were really into the match. I don't even remember the finish, I just recall that it was a wild match in which both men performed in the manner that professional wrestling was meant to be performed. In one corner was a baby face who was over with the fans, as he should be. The fans cheered his every move and were in his corner from the opening bell. On the other side of the ring, you had a heel who had been cutting promos on television telling these fans how their favorite wrestler was too chicken to wrestle him. He had talked about how he was going to not only win the

match, but he was going to beat Armstrong within an inch of his life if he was man enough to accept his challenge.

During the match the two men fought back and forth giving the fans their money's worth and then some in tried and true traditional old school fashion until towards the finish when Funk, "middle aged and crazed" goes nuts and starts throwing everything within reach into the ring on top of Armstrong. Then as Armstrong is lying there covered by trash, trash cans, and metal chairs, Funk goes to the top turnbuckle and does a, "moonsault" right on top of the debris and The Bullet. Again, I don't know what the actual finish was, as in who won and who lost the match, but I do know that was the cue for the baby faces to run to the ring and make the save as the heels were already out there to help Funk finish Armstrong off for good. Chaos ensued as all the faces and heels pulled Funk and Armstrong apart and all continued fighting each other until everyone fought back to the locker room area. This of course closed out the show and a great night of wrestling the way you remember it and the way it should be. It was a true SMW classic show and match.

I was already showered and in my street clothes as I had already worked earlier in the program. The run-in and pull apart were supposed to be a surprise for the fans, so it would have made no sense for all the guys in the back to still be in their wrestling gear. In the back on the baby face side of the Knoxville Civic Coliseum, some of the guys were saying thanks as others were already leaving the building. I remember thanking a few of the guys and I also thanked Bob Armstrong and later on I thanked Cornette for letting me be a part of the card and letting me be involved in the pull apart. But the moment I was most anticipating was to personally thank Terry Funk and to tell him how much I had enjoyed his match that night. I also really wanted to tell him what a huge fan of his I had been since I first began watching pro wrestling. He had actually dressed in an older locker room on the baby face side of the building, just a couple doors down from the newer one with the nicer showers that most of the faces used regularly. I waited a few minutes in hopes that I wouldn't miss him leaving. I also wanted to give him enough time to shower and dress. Well, as fate would have it, pretty much all the guys had left the building by then and I was getting a little antsy thinking that I had actually missed him leaving, so I walked into

the locker room that he had been in. There he was, the man himself, Terry Funk, covered in sweat and dried blood sitting on an old rolled up wrestling mat that had been stored in the rustic locker room area. He was still half dressed with only one boot off, just relaxing. He had some of his gear sitting out, along with a towel, shaving kit, and his street clothes stacked up and ready to put on once he showered.

I walked towards Funk extending my hand and thanked him for coming in for us and also for letting me be a part of the finish of his match. He said thanks as well as I told him what a great match I thought it was and how much I really enjoyed watching it. At this point he had already stood up as I was approaching him with my hand out for the initial handshake. After the thanks and a few kind words from him in return, I asked him if I could talk to him for a few minutes. He said, “Sure, have a seat” and we both sat down on the old rolled up mat.

For the next hour, Terry Funk spoke to me in a calm, soft-spoken voice about, what else, but, professional wrestling. I mentioned that I had been trained by Malenko, and was glad to be in SMW. I expressed what a huge fan of his that I had been through all the years. Other than thanking him for his time, advice, and kind words, I think these were the only words I spoke during that hour. I sat and listened. I listened to his stories about when he broke into the business. He spoke about the importance of being able to talk and do promos. Funk told me how lucky I was to have been trained by Malenko and that I should feel honored to have been trained by such a man. He told me how Malenko could “cut a promo” and talked about so many things that were right about being in the wrestling business and how lucky we were to be a part of something so big. He told me how professional wrestling meant so much to the fans, they are the ones that are the reason we even have a job in this business. I couldn’t believe that he made no attempt to rush the conversation, and as he spoke, blood still caked on his forehead, and a shower only a few feet away, that shower was the farthest thing from his mind. His mind was on pro wrestling and he was taking the time to talk to me. It was if time had stood still and the only thing that mattered in the entire universe was our conversation. This was by far one of the richest and most cherished moments in my wrestling career. He talked and I listened. I was captivated!

As I sat there appreciatively listening to his stories, his advice, and his insights, I couldn't help but just keep thinking over and over to myself, "This man is a living legend. He is the one of the greatest professionals of all time and this man is sharing a moment of his time with me." It was like a dream come true merely to be in the presence of the man that I had admired and respected through the years.

The thing about the conversation that stood out the most to me during this entire time was how humble Terry was when he spoke of himself. He didn't really even talk about himself much, he just spoke, with great passion about the wrestling business. He wasn't trying to impress me with the things he had done, the places he had been, the titles he had held, or any of the many matches he'd had through the years. He spoke about respect, honor, and how great professional wrestling was for him and his family to have been involved in throughout his life.

Terry had just traveled from I don't know where to Knoxville, Tennessee. He had been in the building all day long waiting for the show to begin. He had just finished a main event match, hadn't showered yet, and long after everyone else had left the building, he continued to talk to me like nothing else in the world mattered and I was the most important person in the world to talk to on this night. On top of this, he was scheduled to be in St. Petersburg, Florida the next day. It's at this point that I found out just how much passion, love and respect he had for, the boys, the business, and the men who had come along before him.

"Bobby, you know why I'm going to St. Petersburg tomorrow?" Without even having to think, of course I knew why he was going. He was going to be inducted into the WCW Hall of Fame. So again, without even thinking, I spoke up and said, "Yeah, you're gonna be inducted into the Hall of Fame man."

"No, I'm going for a payday. I'm going down there for a check. I don't deserve to be in any hall of fame. Men like my daddy, my brother Jr, hell, men like your trainer Malenko, those are the men that deserve to be in the hall of fame, not me."

I damn near fell over as by this point he had stood up and was telling me this. I was thinking in my head as I looked at his one boot still lying on the floor beside us, as he stood there, one boot on, one boot off, no shirt, tights still on, blood still dried on his forehead, and the only thought I had was, “Here I am, looking at this man, looking at this worn out wrestling boot, listening to a man about to be honored and inducted into a hall of fame and he’s telling me he isn’t deserving, all the while putting over other men that he felt were more deserving of such a reward of being placed in a hall of fame.” I remember looking back down at that boot and thinking to myself, “Here’s a man that I look up to. This guy is so talented and great. I’m not even worthy to reach down and lace his dirty boot, and he’s putting over others that he deems more worthy.” His voice broke into my thoughts with again repeating, “I’m going down for a payoff. That hall of fame doesn’t mean a damn thing to me.”

Of course I knew he must have felt that it was an honor, and I got the point of what he was emphasizing to me about the skill level and the respect he had for other greats in our business that he had learned from and looked up to. Terry continued to talk to me for a little bit longer and as I said, when it was all said and done, it was about an hour or maybe a little longer. It was like time had stood still. It was and still is one of the greatest moments of my wrestling career. I got to spend time with one of my all time favorite professional wrestlers and it meant so much to me for Terry Funk to take the time to just talk to me. I certainly didn’t expect to spend that much time with him when I approached the locker room that night. To me, it was worth every second and every minute of that hour.

I took so much away from our talk. I think, as I said before, that the main thing that I took away from my time spent with him was just how humble Terry Funk is as a man, and as a professional. I truly realized and was beginning to understand just how much he had given and was willing to give to the great sport of professional wrestling. It really put things in perspective for me to see a man of his credibility and respect still honor those that came before him and that he was taking the time to pass on some of that knowledge and respect to me.

Thank you Terry Funk! Thank you for everything you have ever done for professional wrestling. Thank you for spending and sharing a moment of your time with me.

Now please, if you take anything at all away from my conversation with Terry Funk, don't take away that he wasn't appreciative about going into the WCW Hall of Fame. I know he was only illustrating the importance of the veterans that came before him and emphasizing just how much one has to give of himself for this business. I know he was going to St. Pete for more than a payoff, he was just too humble to admit that he was deserving and rightfully so to be selected to be in the WCW Hall of Fame. This took place in 1995, and since then I'm sure he has had so many other honors bestowed upon him that I couldn't possibly list them all. I'm sure he was appreciative and deserved every award he has earned.

Dory Funk, Jr and Terry Funk were two of the greatest wrestlers of all time. They were both former NWA World Heavyweight Champions and they sold out arenas as individuals and as a tag-team around the world throughout their careers. They are both true living legends. The WWE honored these men once again by inducting in them in the class of 2009 WWE Hall of Fame. It's with great pleasure that I can say that I had the privilege to meet these two great men during my career.

SMW Title Run

I had been off SMW television for a couple of months, but had been doing some house shows here and there as well as working for several independent groups while being off TV. I was still pretty fresh or "hot" from getting the TV exposure from SMW, so staying booked on a regular basis wasn't a problem. One Friday afternoon after returning home from doing some local radio promos in Huntington, West Virginia for some upcoming events, I received a phone call from Jim Cornette. I had only stopped by my house to grab my gear, say good-bye to my family, and head out on the road for three shows that I was booked on down in Tennessee. The last thing on my mind was a call from Jim, especially on a Friday

afternoon, as I was sure he had bookings for SMW that he was scheduled to make over the weekend as well.

After we spoke a few minutes about how things were going and catching up on a few things taking place in wrestling, he told me that he wanted to run an idea by me to see if I was interested in coming back into Smoky Mountain Wrestling for a run with the heavyweight title. I can remember it as if it were just yesterday. I placed my hand over the receiver, covering it, holding it at arm's length away from my body, all the while going absolutely crazy, hoping Jim couldn't see my enthusiasm through the phone. I then remember trying to remain calm as I spoke to Cornette and told him that I would love the opportunity. He gave me a few more details, saying that he was sure we would be working something out in the near future, but to make sure that I absolutely made no mention of this conversation to anyone. I never told a soul. I respected the wrestling business, Jim Cornette, SMW, and myself far too much to make something this big known to anyone. I knew with great confidence from our conversation that this was indeed going to take place. SMW was, to me, just a really great place to work, as I enjoyed the territory, the boys and crew, the fans, and of course the chance to do what I loved doing, wrestling.

While traveling to Tennessee solo that weekend I did a lot of thinking. I reflected back on all that had taken place since I first started working for SMW and I couldn't believe that I was going to be given the chance to become the heavyweight champ. I knew that somewhere in Jim Cornette's mind he had really thought this entire scenario out. He has one of the all-time great minds for the wrestling business, and I knew that along with this opportunity my nightly pay would be increased, which in turn would increase my weekly income. Being the champ would also help my gimmick sales increase as well. All of this comes with a price of course, because this would require more bookings and more travel to defend the belt on a nightly basis. The travel can be brutal at times, being the face of the company and every night my matches, which were already physical, would become more physical. The matches would more than likely be longer as I would have to work even harder each night in the ring defending the title. Also, as champion I would be working in the main event each night, and as a champion, I would have a target on my back, thus I would have to train

even harder out of the ring to keep myself strong and healthy. I knew that if I was given this chance, there was no way that I was going to miss any bookings and I'd make sure that the fans would see me deliver solid matches in the ring each night. Of course, at this point, these were just thoughts, as I would have a couple of months to prepare for my title run, if this indeed was to take place. I told myself that I had time to mentally and physically prepare myself for a title run and I also knew I had to keep this "top secret" as I still had to work every night making all my independent bookings.

On many nights I had to work hard to help get some local guy over, while remaining strong in the fans' eyes. Even though I was working on top of many of these cards, the pay, depending on what independent promoter I was working for would still be whatever fee we had already agreed upon. I couldn't just say, "Hey I'm about to be the next Smoky Mountain Heavyweight Champ, so you need to pay me more and put me in the main event." I never had the attitude that I am going to beat Jerry Lawler in a few weeks, I'm a great wrestler, you need me on your show, you need to pay me more, because I'm better than everyone in your bush league promotion.

I knew that these independent shows were helping me pay my bills and most of these guys had been good to me in between my SMW bookings. I also knew that the guys working on these indie shows were just like me. They loved wrestling, and they were all just trying to run down a dream, just like myself. Hell's fire, it's a work, and I was fortunate enough that they booked me on their shows, so I was going to go out each night and work my ass off in whatever town I was booked. No matter who they booked me with, I was going to try to make sure that I would have the best match on the card. I owed it to the wrestling business and more importantly I owed it to the fans who came out to these shows and supported local wrestling. By God, they were going to get their money's worth when Bobby Blaze was booked.

Once again, being brought into the business the right way, and having respect for protecting the business, I knew that I would honor all my current bookings and would honor whatever pay I had previously agreed upon. I wasn't getting rich, but I was being treated really well by these promoters. I

was usually booked for a decent night's wage, and I usually worked near or on the top of the card, but I did have to make sure that I kept myself looking strong in the ring. I knew that I would eventually make it back to SMW, and strap or no strap, the fans would need to believe in me. They had to know that I was indeed worthy of being a champ. I also knew that, if I was going to be the champ, all eyes would be on me and I would need to prove that I could help bring in fans. I would be responsible to help business, and doing good business is when you can put asses in seats. I knew I'd better be able to deliver in the ring to help increase business for SMW, especially if Cornette and the office had enough confidence in me to make me the heavyweight champion. I wasn't going to "beat" anyone. They were "making" me their champion.

I stayed in touch with Cornette and followed the program and buildup over the course of the next few weeks so I wouldn't be completely in the dark when I was finally back with SMW full-time. As the day for "Sunday Bloody Sunday" drew near, I did let my brother Jimm, who was now living and preaching down in the Florida Keys, know that something was in the works for me, and to please try to make it to Knoxville in a few weeks. I really loved him and he had been so supportive through the years, helping me throughout my career, and I wanted him to be there. I called and asked him to try his best to make it up for this big "upcoming" show as something special, and something big was going to happen. I don't even know if I told him what had been tentatively mapped out, but I remember telling him I really wanted him to be there. I also planned on having my mom make this trip with me. I convinced her that my brother would be there for a visit and she could really use a weekend getaway. I also told her that it would mean a lot to me for her to be at the show. This was one of the best times of my career.

Over the weekend of Friday, February 24th through Sunday, February 26, 1995. I was ready. I had been honoring all my prior booking commitments. I had also booked myself that Friday and Saturday before my return to SMW. Hey, if you don't work, you don't get paid, and if you don't

get paid, your bills don't just suddenly stop coming. The rent has to be paid, and you have to have money to eat.

On that Friday, I was booked on a show about an hour or so from my house. I made the town, worked my match, and was back home by midnight. The SMW television program aired there on a weekly basis and they had even run live shows there a couple of times in the past. The guy who ran this particular promotion usually put together good shows. This one was held in a local high school gym and it was a good house. I received a decent payoff, sold a bunch of gimmicks, and had a good match. Being home by midnight was an added bonus, as I would have to leave early Saturday morning to make the next town in Tennessee, before traveling on over to Knoxville on Sunday.

On Saturday, I was booked for another small promotion and just as I was about to head out the door and hit the road, some goof who worked for the promotion called to tell me they didn't need me to be on their show anymore and that I was fired! Now, to this day, I don't know what in the world happened. I do know that they were just some outlaw promotion that ran a monthly town and they had paid me every time that I had worked for them, which had been about three or four months in a row. They didn't draw big houses, but they were decent, and they always had at least two guys that had worked for SMW, and either WCW, or WWF in the past. Like most independent promotions, they would use a "name" or two fresh off TV and then put the rest of their local crew on the show. Many of these guys were never trained, and if they were trained, they weren't trained properly. Many had no training and were just, "wanna be hacks," or in this case hicks, from the backwoods of Tennessee. Anyway, after being fired and getting off the phone with them, I knew I still had to leave to head towards Knoxville as I had arranged to meet my brother there after the show. We had planned to have a late dinner, visit each other that evening, stay outside of Knoxville, and to visit some more the next morning prior to the afternoon SMW show.

Although I planned on having the extra money from the show on that Saturday, nothing else really changed except that I didn't have to leave home as early, and would still meet my brother later that evening as

planned. I remember telling Mom that we didn't have to leave for a couple more hours as the plans had been changed just a little. Yes, I had talked Mom into going with me, and I know that she was actually excited to get to visit with my brother and his family, as well as to have an opportunity to get away for the weekend.

Having a couple extra hours to spend at home wasn't such a bad thing, but I was really anxious to get on the road to see my brother. I knew it wouldn't do any good to leave as early as planned since he wouldn't be there until later anyway after traveling up from Florida. I knew that I would have time to do some thinking on the drive, but while I was home, all I did was think.

I couldn't help but think, how some idiot from some little independent show had actually "fired me." I really wanted to tell them off, and say a few choice words. I didn't really say anything, though, except that I appreciated the work they had given me. I knew it was their loss, not mine, because the next night I would be "winning" the SMW title and I knew they would be calling back as soon as they found out. I also knew that when they called that I probably would never go back to work for them and their little promotion again. Sure, I wanted to tell them to F-off, or that they were the ones really messing things up, because they could have had the SMW Champ on their card in the future, but I didn't.

I will say, it was a gratifying feeling, knowing that these goofs would be calling me back as soon as they caught wind of the title change. Even more gratifying was the fact that I knew some of those guys would be in attendance on that Sunday afternoon. Again, these guys were total goofs and these were just some thoughts that went through my mind during the couple of hours of time I had to think on things before leaving for Knoxville.

Fast forward to showtime on Sunday, February 26, 1995. Only a few people knew what was going to happen on the "Sunday Bloody Sunday" show. I know I hadn't told anyone. I honored what Cornette had asked me to do, and that was to keep it quiet. I think there were some of the boys on

the show that didn't even know what was going to happen that night, as the business wasn't as "exposed" as it is today. The angle had been built up over the course of several weeks, and since I wasn't really involved in the build up, it really was a "surprise" when the match finally did take place.

I was scheduled to be in the opening match on a show that was filled with some of the top talent that represented what many may remember as being the last of the territories. Almost every guy on the show had worked at some point or another in one of the bigger federations like, the AWA, the NWA, WCW, or the WWF. Of course many of the guys working for SMW, or who had worked for any of the bigger companies, worked their way to SMW through the old Memphis Territory. A lot of other matches scheduled for this special night pitted several guys from the SMW crew against the talent from the USWA. Basically, what the fans were getting in addition to some great wrestlers and matches was the feeling of an East Tennessee, represented by the wrestlers of SMW, versus West Tennessee, being represented by the guys working the Memphis Territory, or the USWA as it was then known.

Right before I was to go out for the first match, I had a thought about the music that I used to come out for my matches. I had always used, "Where Ever I May Roam," by Metallica from early on when I first came into SMW. I ran out to my car and grabbed a cassette tape, (hey, at least it wasn't an 8-track) that had a Tom Petty song on it that I used to listen to all the time, "Running Down A Dream." I thought, since I was making a comeback into the territory, and "winning" the SMW Heavyweight Title, that a change of music would be a nice surprise for the fans and for my entrance music. This just kind of happened real quick, as I said, but as I was about to go out for the opening match, I thought to myself, "I have run down a dream. I'm living it every day and night. But, since I first came into the territory, I had never backed down from anyone, and hadn't ever submitted or tapped out to anyone, why not use, 'I Won't Back Down' instead?" I had kind of been the "no quit kid" from doing a string of matches early on in SMW with a pretty good run that I had with "The Dirty White Boy," Tony Anthony. So I ran back inside and handed Mark Curtis the tape and he gave it to the ring crew and from that point on, "I Won't Back Down" became my entrance music. It was as simple as that really. I

thought, “Hey, I’m gonna have this target on my back as the champ, and everyone is going to be gunning for this belt, I can’t back down from anyone, no matter what.” After that, it just kind of stuck with me, my gimmick, which was me and my persona.

The music came on and a few seconds into the song I came through the curtain to a pretty good pop, which I was happy to hear. I then entered the ring for the first of what would soon enough turn into three matches before the night was over. My opponent for the evening was Brian Logan, who was a pretty good worker. Brian had been trained by Tim Horner at the Smoky Mountain Wrestling School which had recently opened. During this time, he had several matches under his belt and had become a regular for the SMW shows. We were scheduled to go for about 6-8 minutes with me getting most of the match. I had wrestled Brian before for TV and he always made me look good, so I was glad that he understood what his job was on this evening and let me say, he did it really well. He put me over strong right around the five minute mark and Bobby Blaze was back in SMW.

The next few matches went on as planned. There was a little in house angle where Buddy Landel would attack Tony Anthony before a match scheduled with Jerry “The King” Lawler. Buddy took the house mic and made some comments about how it, “Looked like it’s me and you now, Lawler.” The fans were really buying into the entire angle and it was going smooth. Then the commissioner, Bob Armstrong, put a halt to Landel’s antics. “The Bullet” told Landel and the crowd that the stipulation was that the winner of the Landel vs Anthony match would get the title shot against Lawler, but since Buddy hadn’t actually won, due to his earlier attack that left Tony unable to wrestle, “I’m going in the back and grabbing the first wrestler I see. I’m bringing him out here for a title shot with Lawler, and you, Landel, can wrestle the winner of that match for your title shot!”

Jerry Lawler & Bobby

I was in the back kind of listening to what was taking place, and every once in a while taking a quick peek through the curtain. I stepped back

away when I saw that Bob Armstrong was making his way closer to where I was standing so I stepped around the corner and waited for him. He asked me if I was ready, and I just nodded as he led me back through the curtain to a very stunned crowd, and to an even more stunned Jerry Lawler who must have thought that this was some kind of a joke. He told the crowd that I was a "Curtain Jerker" and would have no problem beating me and that Landel would get his shot soon enough. Landel of course was playing it up as well, while acting like the head cheerleader for the Bobby Blaze fan club. Buddy was encouraging me throughout the match, because if I won, then he would also be able to beat me pretty easy, especially after I'd done battle with Lawler first. He knew that I would be tired and beat up from the match and if I were to win, the SMW title would virtually be his. I would be easy pickin's to beat for the belt. Both men couldn't have been more professional in playing up their roles for this evening's main event. Of course, I expected nothing less, as both were true professionals who both had been very successful throughout their careers.

"Beating," winning, or upsetting Jerry Lawler for the SMW Heavyweight Title was a big deal when the match ended. Who would have thought that I could beat, "The King?" It was like a dream come true as I had grown up watching Memphis Wrestling, and I couldn't believe that I had just won the match. The fans, of course, couldn't believe it either. They went absolutely nuts with a loud pop at the end of the match when Mark Curtis brought the belt into the ring and handed it to me. The fans had been thrown a swerve and a huge one at that, considering I wasn't even advertised to be involved in that evening's main event. But, the excitement was short-lived and was far from over, as "The Nature Boy" Buddy Landel grabbed the house microphone and said, "Well Bobby, it looks like it's me and you!" He stepped through the ropes and started immediately to beat me down right where a very "pissed off" and "upset" Lawler got a few last kicks in. It looked as if Bobby Blaze was going to lose the title just as quickly as he had won it.

Bobby's title match with Buddy Landel

Landel had a great punch. When it comes to throwing a punch in wrestling, his punches are pretty amazing. Bobby Eaton and Bob Cook have great working punches, as does Ric Flair and Landel's are just as impressive as theirs. So Buddy proceeded to beat me up, down, and into the ground before discarding me out of the ring. Then he threw me into and through a table and my head split open. Hey, this show wasn't called, "Sunday,

Bloody, Sunday" after some U2 song, it was called "Sunday, Bloody, Sunday" for a reason. There was going to be be blood! Mine! Bleeding, exhausted, and beat down like a dog, Buddy rolls me back into the ring and then puts me into a corner and continues to pound my face a few more times before taking me to another turnbuckle where he repeats throwing blows to my face and forehead. After trying to stand, I am on wobbly legs and just kind of squatting on the bottom turnbuckle while Buddy goes over to run his mouth some with Bob Armstrong, who was now joined by his son Scott, the two of them trying to prevent Tony Anthony from entering the ring. After I was led to yet another turnbuckle, referee Mark Curtis checked the gash on my head to see if he should stop the match due to all the blood, asking if I wanted to quit or if I was still able to defend myself.

When Buddy gets finished running his mouth with Tony, he proceeds to hammer me with even more punches. By now he's drawing his fists back and just picking his target, my face, apart with each devastating blow. Again, he turns his attention to Anthony, who is still trying to distract Buddy by trying to climb up on the ring apron, and then it happens.

Out of nowhere, I gain just enough strength to stand almost all the way up, before collapsing back down to the mat, only this time, out of instinct, I grab Buddy in a "school boy" and roll him up on my way down and cover him for the win. Yes! That's a win! It's the third win of the evening and Bobby Blaze remains the new SMW Heavyweight Champion!

It was and still is an honor to have been awarded the SMW belt by Cornette, Sandy, Brian, and all the crew who made this dream a reality. For Lawler to come in and be completely professional about dropping the belt to me, not only putting me over, but to help put SMW over. The office and these men made it happen. Of course, I have to thank Buddy as well, and all the crew, because now I was The Champ and I knew I would have to be the face for our company. This was especially exciting to the fans, and I want to thank them as well for supporting me that night. It's for them that we do what we do. Putting the belt on me showed the respect and trust that Cornette and SMW had for me. That, respect from my peers, was always important to me, and it still is, in fact. I have always respected the business. I respect those that came before me, and those that I worked with and for. I

also respected myself knowing that Cornette, Lawler, Landel, and a few others had to keep this night under wraps, so when we did throw a swerve and the finish did go off, it would be that much more special for the fans. The fans deserved that much, because if it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have a job. They got one heck of a show that night in Knoxville, thanks to good booking, that had so many talented guys on the card, representing both companies, all good, solid matches, and to be thrown such a swerve in the main event, wow, a big surprise finish, a big pop, and a tremendous night of wrestling action. For me it was a huge feeling of accomplishment! SMW was, "Wrestling the way it used be...Wrestling the way you like it!" To me, when I think of SMW, I like to say, "Wrestling the way it should be...Wrestling the way you remember it." Either way, SMW was a great company to work for and a lot of talented guys came through the territory. I got to wrestle with, travel with, and got to know most of the crew on a very personal basis, and for that, I am forever thankful.

SMW Heavyweight Champion, Bobby Blaze
"Sunday Bloody Sunday" Feb 26, 1995

A WRITTEN CONTRACT

THIS CONTRACT is entered into this 29 day of July, between MICHINOKU PRO WRESTLING CO.,LTD, 9 - 8 Zaimoku-cho,Morioka,Iwate, Japan hereinafter called "FIRST PATRY" and

NAME AND ADDRESS: Robert Smedley
2402 MAIN St. ASHLAND KY 41101
TELEPHONE NUMBER (606)329-9452
hereinafter called "SECOND PARTY"

The terms and conditions agreed upon are as follows:

1. For the purpose of performing professional and international wrestling matches in Japan ,FIRST PARTY employs SECOND PARTY as a pro-wrestler for days between Jul. 29 and Aug. 10.

2. This contract period shall be 13 days between Jul. 29 and Aug. 10.

3. SECOND PARTY shall arrive in Japan 2 days prior to the above contact period.

4. FIRST PARTY agrees to pay SECOND PARTY US$ _____ GROSS [US$ _____ NET/AFTER TAXES] per fight as wages, totaling to US$ 3.063 GROSS [US$ 2.450 NET/AFTER TAXES].

5. FIRST PARTY shall provide SECOND PARTY with round trip transportattion,tourist class, NW Yclass.

6. FIRST PARTY shall provide SECOND PARTY with domestic hotel charges and traffic expenses required to perform the scheduled wrestling matches during the contaracted period.

7. SECOND PARTY shall not take part in any wrestling matches,exhibitions or other exercise his professional talents in any manner or place except as directed or approved by FIRST PARTY during this contracted period.

eight

Japan

“Koketsu ni irazunba koji wo ezu” - Japanese Quote. Literally: “If you do not enter the tiger’s cave, you will not catch its cub.” What? “Nothing ventured, nothing gained. You can’t do anything without risking something.”

When I was training back at Malenko’s in Tampa, one of the things that was so unique was the amount of talented guys that were there. There were guys like: Rico Federico. Rico and I toured Canada together as well as tagged and worked together over in Australia. “Haystacks Calhoun Jr.,” who I happened to put over in his first match over in St. Petersburg, when he was known as “Man Mountain Brody.” Pin me and pay me, I make everybody look good. Sean Waltman, who I roomed with often on weekends. Of course you may know Sean as “The 1,2,3 Kid,” and “X-Pac.” I worked with him several times when he was just “The Lightning Kid”, and again while he was in WWF, when SMW and the WWF did a combined show down in Marietta, Georgia, at the famous Cobb County Civic Center. In addition to these guys and a few others, there were several other really good wrestlers who came and trained on a regular basis even though they had already been working regularly for years.

There was Bob Cook, who also worked as, “The Masked Super Star” throughout Florida and was a tremendously talented guy. I always liked teasing Bob that he did Terry Funk almost as good as The Funker himself. Bob also had one of the best punches in pro wrestling. He is a close second to, “Beautiful” Bobby Eaton when it comes to throwing a punch, in my book.

Nasty Ned, Brady Boone, and Jumbo Beretta were some of the many other talented guys who would stop in regularly to train. It was also around this time that I met a really tough guy by the name of Willie Wilkinson Jr., who already had several tours of Japan under his belt by the time I met him.

Willie was a quiet Native American guy, who really prided himself on his conditioning and training. He was a good shooter and usually trained every Sunday when most of the training consisted of actual wrestling, conditioning, and shooting. Submission fighting techniques were offered on Sundays. It was a good experience to be around so many different guys with different styles. What's all this have to do with Japan? Everything. Everything is the only way I can answer why this falls under my stories about Japan.

One, many young Japanese guys were also at the training camp while I was there. Two, the submission training on Sundays would eventually be important to me when I finally had a chance to go to Japan to wrestle. And, three, it was Willie Wilkerson, Jr. who helped me get my first contract over in Japan.

Willie was the one who turned in my promo photos and VHS tape to the offices at Michinoku Pro Wrestling, also known as North Eastern Wrestling. Michinoku was one of the first professional wrestling organizations in Japan that wasn't based out of Tokyo, but rather in Morioka, Iwate. It was founded by Masanori Murakawa, who is better known in Japan and around the world as The Great Sasuke.

I didn't know it at the time, but I later found out while I was on my second tour of Japan, when I was walking one day with Parrirusso "The Russian Dog" Joe Kimbell that he was actually in the office when Willie turned in my tape. Sasuke saw me taking the power bomb from the top rope and said, "Get that guy here, he's crazy. I like that." So with that I was later contacted to come over for my first three week tour of Japan.

I first went over to Japan in April of 1997. Willie had had the office there contact me and off to, "The Land of the Rising Sun," I went. That had become one of my first goals after I began training at Malenko's camp. I was stoked to say the least. I was offered a good weekly salary, was put right into a good spot with Michinoku Pro Wrestling, and had a really good first tour.

On that first tour I was to go over for three weeks. I was surprised to find out that Willie had come back to the US after having been there for five

years and he would not be on that first tour with me. I was met at Narita International airport by a young Mexican guy that wrestled as, “Super Boy.” His real name was Sergio, and he helped me get around to the hotel and to the tour bus on my first couple of days. I eventually ended up going back on several more tours of Japan for Michinoku. I have to say I really enjoyed my tours of Japan. The only problem I had, which really wasn’t as big of a problem as one might think was the language barrier.

Some of the guys that I wrestled with on these tours were, The Great Saskuke, Gran Hamada, Jinsei Shinzaki, who many may remember by his WWF ring name, “Hakushi,” Terry Boy, Dick Togo, Shawn Funaki, Tiger Mask IV, and future WWF star, Taka Michinoku.

Of course by the time my second tour rolled around, Willie was back in Japan and was on all the other tours that I did over in Japan. Two other Americans that I would eventually meet and become friends with were a young talented guy that had also been trained by Dean Malenko, named Chad Collyer, and as mentioned Joe Kimbell.

Joe was a really hardnosed worker that had a tremendous body. I really enjoyed traveling and working with Chad and Joe. All three of us ended up on a tour together in England after a couple of tours in Japan together. I wrestled Joe in Japan and England, but never got to work with him in the US. As for Chad, I got to work with him in Japan, England, and in the USA. It’s funny how this business works. You meet guys like Willie, Joe, and Chad, all from the US, and end up wrestling with them in some foreign land. I’ve got a lot of good memories of all three.

The thing about the Japanese wrestling, and I really respect this, is that most of the guys there are sent to a dojo and they work out and train for close to two years before they even have their first match. That’s what’s wrong with the wrestling in the US right now, too many guys can get into it way too easy, and many more have their first match way before they are developed or ready. In Japan, these guys live, eat, and drink professional wrestling before they have that match. Plus, when they have it, they are more than prepared. I had good matches with every Japanese wrestler I climbed into the ring with, and that includes the “young boys” as they are called. I, of course was referred to as a “Gaijin” or foreigner. All those guys

there could work, and they would work their butts off in the ring to have a good match. I indeed enjoyed my many trips to Japan.

Touring Japan can be extremely demanding, both mentally and physically. You have to understand, once I was ready to go on a wrestling tour of Japan, I had to first get there. In the eastern part of Kentucky where I live there isn't an international airport. There's Huntington Tri-State, HTS as it is known, but you have to catch a small commuter plane to either Pittsburgh, or Charlotte, if you go via US Air, or you have to go through Cincinnati if you use Delta. At one point I probably knew these three airports better than I did my own home. There was a kind lady at HTS that always slipped her finger "accidentally" across her keypad and I would somehow get an "open seat in first class" at my next destination. That wasn't always the case, but I was most thankful when that did happen, which was more often than not, thanks to her kindness. I was on a first name basis with the bartender in Charlotte who always had a cold beer or a Long Island Iced Tea ready for me during the many layovers I had in that town.

This may sound all nice and warm and may sound nice for easy travel, but believe you me, that wasn't always the case. Whenever I flew to Japan, I had to travel via automobile three hours to either Louisville or Cincinnati in order to make my first flight. After catching a short flight from either of these two cities, I would then have to make a connecting flight to either Atlanta or Chicago in order to catch a fourteen hour flight to Narita International Airport in Japan. After arriving there, I still had to go on a commuter train to Tokyo. I would then catch a few hours sleep in a "businessman's" hotel, before an early wake up call in order to catch yet another train that would take me to the first city where I would begin the tour by catching what I called "the team bus." Hell, I would be so worn out from the travel, the time zone difference, and the cultural shock of it all, that for the first day or two I thought I was in the twilight zone. After about three days of this, it all starts to settle in that you're going to be on this bus touring for another 18-21 days depending on how many weeks you had signed a contract for. Like the song says, "It's a long way to the top, if ya wanna rock-n-roll," and that's what you feel like when you step through that curtain every night, ready to perform for all those people who paid their

hard earned money to see you wrestle. You feel like a rock star and for me personally, I always wanted to give every one of them my very best while I was in the ring, so no matter how far or how long I had been traveling, I always gave the fans 100% of my very best in order for them to see this ole' boy from Kentucky wrestle.

The longest tour I was on in Japan was four weeks and the shortest was a twelve day tour. Of course, once the tour was over, I usually had a ten to fifteen hour bus ride back to Tokyo, to catch another train out to the airport, catch another fourteen hour flight home, catch a commuter plane again, only to still have a three hour car ride back to Ashland. Man, that is one long ass time to be traveling pretty much non-stop.

I never complained about doing these tours, as the money was well worth it. The talent on the tours was awesome, and the matches and shows were unreal. I truly loved every minute of my experiences going to and from Japan during my career and I wouldn't trade those experiences with anyone.

Whenever I came home from Japan I was always in great shape. Once you're there on tour, you basically get into a really good routine. You wake up, go have breakfast, catch a bus to the next town, work out, sometimes with weights, and sometimes just doing all the basic body weight exercises that you know, ie: pushups, sit ups, Hindu pushups, Hindu squats, neck bridges, and running. Then you wrestle your match that night, get back on the bus, head to the hotel or to the next city and in the morning you get up and do it all again. Sometimes the workouts consisted of actually going to a gym and lifting or you could lift weights when you arrived at the building each night, as the ring truck had a bench, and a large assortment of weights.

I especially enjoyed getting to learn how to use Indian clubs that Willie had. If you have ever seen The Iron Sheik use those clubs back in the day on TV, then you'll know exactly what I'm talking about. They are usually heavy, the ones we used weighed around thirty pounds, and it takes several attempts just to lift them, let alone learn how to use them. I became quite good at them with Willie teaching me how to use them.

Most of the guys would get in the ring, prior to the shows and stretch as well. Some would exercise in the ring doing a combination of stretches, pushups and neck bridges. I once saw Willie hold a neck bridge for thirty minutes. This didn't surprise me, because I knew that Willy had trained with Karl Gotch while he was in Florida. It was not surprising that Willie was "the policeman" for Michinoku. Even though he worked in the main events for a few years, while I was there, he was helping to train a lot of the younger guys, and he also worked with them in the earlier matches on the card, basically teaching them about respect as much as he was teaching them about working. Can you say stiff? The younger Japanese guys would also train and learn to wrestle prior to many shows to improve their chances of becoming a professional, as this was all a part of paying their dues.

While on tour in "The Land of the Rising Sun" you're pretty much on a bus every day. There's usually about twenty guys and sometimes a couple of girls that may be on the tour for a few of the shows. Most of the tours I was on had a couple of American guys, a couple of Mexican guys, and the rest of the Japanese crew. Everyone has an assigned seat and mine was always the second seat from the front. There was a little more room in the first couple of seats on either side of the bus. I liked my seat as it was up front and I could easily enjoy the on-bus television.

The Japanese programming was usually some kind of a comedy show which actually became easy to follow, as the actors and participants on these shows were doing a lot of physical comedy. In addition to the Japanese programming, they also played movies on a disc and these were usually American films that were either in English or had the subtitles on the screen. Wrestling shows were shown, and of course that's pretty much self explanatory.

The one program that I enjoyed a lot was when they played baseball on the TV. Hamada usually had baseball on if it was in season, and it seemed like we were the only two that enjoyed watching the baseball games. Japanese baseball was really fun to watch.

Of course, being an avid reader, I spend much of my time on the bus reading books or magazines while listening to music through my

headphones. I always made sure to take some of my favorite cassettes or CDs on the tours.

Other than the “businessman’s” hotel that I stayed in upon arrival and again before departure all the hotels were really nice. The rooms were smaller than US hotel rooms but had enough space to get a good night’s sleep. In the morning, the hotels offered a really nice spread of food. They usually served a “Western breakfast” which was pretty much like a Shoney’s buffet, minus the biscuits and gravy. There were always eggs, several different meats, milk, juice and an array of fresh fruits. They also served several Japanese foods in addition to the traditional breakfast items. There was plenty of rice, seaweed, and several kinds of fish or fish dishes. They also had soba noodles, which I loved. Soba noodles are made of buckwheat flour and are a little thicker than traditional spaghetti noodles. I would usually mix in some wasabi for some spice and enjoy it in addition to my normal breakfast.

Almost every hotel offered this type of breakfast, but one time we were touring way out in a town located in the beautiful mountains. This wasn’t a town that we normally toured but we were going to be doing two shows in the area. The town was located in a very remote, rural area that hadn’t been “westernized.” We stayed in a big hotel that more resembled a castle and the scenery was picturesque. There wasn’t any television in the rooms. It was very serene and so peaceful, like going back in time. You can bet there was no “Western breakfast” offered. I passed on eating the traditional Japanese breakfast, and only ate a bowl of rice each morning while we stayed there. There was just something about a big black oily fish sitting on a bed of seaweed that wasn’t very appealing to me.

One of the meals that I did rather enjoy was unagi, which is freshwater eel. It’s usually served during the summer months and let me tell you, served over a bed of rice it is a nice meal.

Surprisingly enough, another meal that I quite enjoyed while touring Japan was gyutan which is basically beef tongue. It may sound like an unusual meal, but it’s pretty popular and has a wonderful taste when seasoned just right.

Some of my best memories of Japan are about how much the Japanese people respected and appreciated professional wrestling. I, in turn, always had a lot of respect for the Japanese fans. The fans there don't yell and boo like they do in a lot of other places, especially like they do in the US. The fans there watch. They watch the match and when you do some actual chain wrestling, or when you counter a move or go for a submission hold, they react with the sounds of, "Ooh, or Awe," or even with a small applause. They enjoy the high spots and "pop" with the clapping of hands and again by maybe yelling one of the combatant's names out when the spot is over. At the finish of the match, there's usually a loud applause for the winner, but if you had a good match, the fans there will even clap if you lost the match. It's just a sign of respect, that they respected your talent and/or your match on that night. They appreciate the efforts of both men, or all the men if it's a tag or six-man match.

Traveling, sharing a bus, staying in the same hotels, and at times working out together becomes such a grind on everyone on tour that there are times you just need to find ways to keep yourself entertained. Even though the schedule is hectic and after a couple of days on tour in Japan, everything becomes routine, there's also some down time that gives you time to think about your family back home, or how great it is to be an American, but it also gives you time to pull "ribs" on each other.

I wasn't always one to rib guys, and I don't feel like I was ribbed a lot, but I did enjoy watching some of the ribs that I saw pulled. With that said I did however pull a good rib on Chad one night before a show. After arriving at the building and working out, I found out that I would later be working and putting Chad over on that night's card. I went to Saskuke, and asked him could I ask a favor and would he go along with it if I ribbed Chad. He smiled and said that he would and that he actually thought it was funny even before I pulled the rib once I told him what my plan was.

I went off to myself to get my mindset right so that I could do what I had planned with a straight face. I then approached Chad in the locker room and told him, in a serious voice that I was really bothered by something and felt the need to speak with him. He, being the great guy that he is, immediately said, "Yes," and I explained to him that I felt that even though

he was over with the fans in Japan, and I was scheduled to put him over, that I just didn't feel like it was the right thing to do. He just kind of nodded and listened as I further explained, that since I had more experience than he did and that I had been to Malenko's before him, that the honorable thing to do was for him to put me over. He was listening intensely, not really sure where my sternness and attitude were stemming from. Nonetheless, he listened and finally agreed to put me over, but stipulated that we should at least run it by the office first before changing a finish. This, of course was exactly what I had expected and what I wanted him to say and do. Let me say at this point, I have a great deal of respect for Chad, and by no means was I trying to embarrass him, I was just trying to keep myself and some of the boys entertained.

So we leave the locker room together and I tell the referee to come over to the table where Saskuke is sitting. I hear Chad and Saskuke making small talk as I approach the table and begin getting louder with the ref about how I don't feel that it's right that I have to put Chad over. The ref, not being in on the joke, seemed a little surprised to hear my tone. I had at no point during this tour refused any finishes whether I was going over or not. I didn't ever question a finish while in Japan. The matches and finishes are so well thought out that there was never a need for me to ever question one.

I came up to the table and asked Saskuke if Chad had mentioned anything to him that I had said in the locker room. He acknowledged that Chad was concerned about me, "Not wanting to put him over tonight." I said, "That's right! I really don't think it's very professional, that I have more experience and I have to put him over." I then went on to explain that I was taller than him.

The ref looked a little confused to say the least, but Saskuke nodded in agreement that I had a good point. Chad has a great body with low body fat, but again, I went on to explain that I am even bigger than him, "My shoulders are wider, I outweigh him by twenty or twenty-five pounds." Again, Saskuke nodded and agreed that maybe I had a good point. Of course I was making up some ridiculous points, even pointing out that I had been a champion wrestler in the US, having "won" the SMW Heavyweight Title, making it sound as if I was a real life wrestling champion. I knew that

Chad had actually been an outstanding high school and collegiate wrestler, and I was trying to really get his goat by saying that I had “won” a title because I was such a good wrestler. “I’m even a better wrestler than Chad, and if we were to fight, I’m pretty sure that I would win.”

With that Saskuke was now really on my side as to my make-no-sense, invalid points about me not wanting to put Chad over. He even said something along the lines of, “Please, we don’t want any fights, business only.” The banter had continued for a good ten minutes or so with some of the other wrestlers who were passing by or within ear shot really wondering what was going over there between us.

Being the good sport he is, Chad took this all in stride, and I think he really was convinced that maybe it was best if he let me go over in the match if it was that important to me. I finally had to look up and make sure Saskuke would know that the joke was over before busting out laughing.

Chad and the ref just kind of stood there at first, not sure what the hell had just happened until Saskuke explained to them that I had actually asked his permission to rib Chad before even approaching him in the locker room. Needless to say the tension was broken and everyone ended up having a good laugh over the matter.

I don’t think I ever had a bad match with Chad. He was such a good wrestler and knew how to get over and what would get over with the Japanese fans. He and I always had good matches while in Japan, and on this night in particular, I recall having a really good match with him.

A couple of weeks later, the rib was on me, as it was my birthday, and once again Chad was scheduled to go over and wouldn’t even put me over on my damn birthday. Pin me, pay me! I would put Chad over any place and any country and that’s the truth. In fact, I think I went on to put him over in England and the US. But, “Chad couldn’t you have at least put me over on my birthday?” It’s times like these that make me appreciate and remember some of the good guys, like Chad that I met while out on the road wrestling.

While recalling matches from some of the tours, I always enjoyed working in six-man tag matches. They were fun to be involved in as they were wild and a lot different from other matches. The fans really get into those six-man tag matches as the action spills out into the crowd around the ring, and eventually back into the ring. Basically those matches start with the heels attacking the baby faces as soon as they announce the faces names and turns into a wild brawl. Once all the out of the ring craziness takes place, and the action resumes in the ring, everyone works out a quick spot with each other, alternating so at some point, every heel has had a chance to work with one of the faces until you work or wrestle to the finish. Japanese finishes start anywhere between five to ten minutes out from the actual finish with a lot of false finishes in between. It's very entertaining to say the least and all out non-stop action from bell to bell.

I also worked with Jensei. He was about the same size I am, and we always had a good competitive match. He had already worked for several years and from what I understand, being one of the bigger guys there, one of the bigger companies needed a guy to come in and work with The Undertaker. He did so well that the WWF eventually brought him to the US where he worked for them for three years before going back to Japan. He was over big with the crowds there. We usually had one of two finishes that were done each night, with me either taking a "power bomb," or submitting to a weird twisted kind of camel clutch.

One night right after the power bomb, Teddy-son the referee hit the mat to deliver the three count, "ichi, ni, Puuuupppp!" No, that's not the number three in Japanese, that or something like it was the sound of me farting right when the ref started to give me the three count. For those who don't know what a power bomb is, well this was basically an atomic power bomb. My opponent's head was right between my legs, in the crotch region and right when my back hit the mat, I let one rip right in the middle of the ring. The ref was laughing, Jensei looked up in horror, and almost smiled, but really didn't know whether to pin me or go blind, so he immediately rolled me over to my stomach and submitted me via the twisted clutch. Pin me, pay me, but I doubt that victory smelled too sweet that night.

On another occasion I was in a tag match against Saskuke and his partner that night, Rikki Fuji, another big star there who did kind of a rock-n-roll gimmick. Before the match we were having words and as Rikki was in my face, I flipped him the bird and said, “Rock and roll is dead and so is Elvis!” He almost started laughing, turned away to keep from doing so, and off we went with me attacking him from behind. It wasn’t planned, unlike some of the stuff you see on TV today, but it really started the match off hot and the fans really bought it. After the attack I kicked him and while he was bent over, I hit the ropes and ran across the ring to kick him in the head.

It was a “worked” kick so I know that I didn’t kick him too hard, but in perfect English from behind me I heard Saskuke say, “God Damn Bobby, you stiff!” That was when I almost started laughing right during the middle of my heat. I turned and looked, as I really thought he was serious. I did a quick look back to see Rikki selling the kick, and realized he was alright, then I flipped Saskuke off and told him, while trying not to laugh, “You’re lucky it wasn’t you motherfucker!” It was funny to be having such a good match, with the fans really into it, and even though we were all working hard, and maybe even a little stiff, we were all having fun. That’s what’s so cool about being able to work and having good guys to work with because you can go out to the ring, work your ass off, and have a good time while doing so. The fans really got their money’s worth during that match and it was one of the most enjoyable matches on that tour.

One of my fondest memories from a match in, “The Land of the Rising Sun” was with “The Great Saskuke.” We had been in tag matches and six-man tag matches before, but had never faced each other in a one-on-one match up until this one special night when he gave me a title shot at his championship belt. It was by far one of my top five matches of all time. We were scheduled to be in the main event in a small town near his home town, so needless to say the house was packed with fans wanting to see their local and one of their national heroes fight this big, strong, mean, and nasty American, as I was told that’s what the newspaper had said about me. I loved the role of the heel, especially when I was facing one of the biggest stars in the country. I was booked personally by Saskuke on this night and that made it even more special, knowing that he had enough confidence in me to face him on any given night. Many times before big matches in

Japan, fans throw streamers of ribbons in the ring and go absolutely crazy when there's a title on the line.

They also have a ceremony where they give each competitor a bouquet of flowers before a title match, because it's really a special occasion when the title is at stake. It was a true honor to be chosen, to be appreciated and shown that much respect before, during, and after the match. Of all the matches I had and having told a couple stories about having fun during some of those matches while there, I was truly nervous before this one. I knew it was going to be special, but I also knew that I had to be on, and really deliver on this particular night.

There's a lot of pressure when you're wrestling the boss, who is this huge super star, in the main event for the title. Many people don't understand this about pro wrestling. I'm not only talking about the fans not knowing these pressures, but, some of the wrestlers don't understand this kind of pressure. Anyone, who has been half-assed trained and decides to run some small show and put themselves in a main event and "play" pro wrestler will never understand this. This is why a lot of these guys working on the independent scene today will never make it in the wrestling business.

I had been trained professionally and probably at this point had close to two thousand matches during the past ten years before this night. If I didn't take pride in what I was doing, or didn't care about going out and trying to tear the house down, there wouldn't have been this kind of pressure. But, I took pride in what I did, and I knew how important this match was going to be for me personally. I wanted to deliver, and I can say with great pride, that on this night, I busted my ass, and I did my job and I did go out and have a really over the top, top notch match with Saskuke. Of course it takes two to tango, and on this night we danced. It was beautiful. This match, as I mentioned was one of my top five best and favorite matches during my career.

We went twenty-two minutes on this night and the action was pretty much non-stop. My adrenaline had never been higher. The few things that I recall, as there were many complex spots during the match, were how easy he was to work with and how he "sold" and "put over" everything that I did to him during this match. Of course I expected nothing less from a main-

event super star. I do remember when he went to the top rope to do what is known as a “shooting star press,” I caught him in mid-air and felt his body slipping through my hands and arms. I could sense his head was within inches of hitting the concrete floor before I arched back and pulled him up as he was on his way down and I took the bump of his full weight on my body. I knew that I not only took a great bump from such a beautiful move, but I had also saved him from busting his head open or breaking his neck before he hit the floor.

That’s called working! That’s called being a professional, when you can make something look so good, that you just know the fans, like I had been my entire life, really appreciated witnessing something special. While on the ground, struggling to get up, Saskuke grabbed my leg and gave me a little double squeeze around my ankle as a gesture to let me know that he was alright, but also it was to non-verbally say, “Thank you.”

I also remember the finish that seemingly out of nowhere, after beating Saskuke down, he made a small comeback, and once again climbed to the top rope and after catching him and rolling through to attempt to pin him, he reversed my counter to his move and locked on a Japanese arm-bar for the “win” via my submission. The fans went absolutely crazy to see their hero beat the big, ugly American wrestler to retain his championship belt.

Once I got to my feet, still holding and selling my arm, we shook hands and hugged in the middle of the ring. I also bowed to Saskuke, and then to the crowd to show my respect and appreciation. Hey, pin me, pay me, I just had one hell of a match against one of the best in the world. It’s these kinds of memories that make me really feel good about myself and just how far I had taken my wrestling career. The guys that are in professional wrestling understand that it’s not always that big contract or being on television. It’s about being able to work. It’s about taking such pride in your ability to work that you can go out and deliver this kind of match to the fans. That to me is what “it” is to be a true professional.

INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR AGREEMENT
FOR: ROBERT SMEDLEY
EXHIBIT "A"

COMPENSATION: In consideration of Wrestler's grant of the rights, licenses and services hereunder, and provided Wrestler faithfully and fully performs all of his obligations hereunder, WCW shall pay Wrestler at the rate of Sixty-five Thousand Dollars ($65,000) per year.

TERM: This Agreement shall commence as of September 15, 1997, and shall continue until September 14, 1999. Thereafter, this Agreement shall automatically renew for successive one year terms at the rate of Sixty-five Thousand Dollars ($65,000) per year unless WCW shall serve written notice to Wrestler at least thirty (30) days prior to the end of the term of this Agreement of its decision to terminate this Agreement at the end of the term. Reference herein to the term hereof means the original term and any such renewal or extended term.

HOME BASE: Ashland, KY

ADDRESS: 2402 Main Street, Ashland, KY 41101

Robert Smedley

WRESTLER

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, INC.

nine

WCW

“The wrestling business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long concrete tunnel where thieves and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs. There’s also a negative side.” apologies to Hunter S. Thompson (a fellow Kentuckian)

I had a couple of chances to go to work for World Championship Wrestling, WCW, prior to actually getting a call from Terry Taylor for a tryout match. Before going any further, I would like to take the time to personally thank Terry Taylor, Arn Anderson, Kevin Sullivan, and Paul Orndorff. These gentlemen treated me with respect and were very supportive of my work and my matches while I was under contract with WCW. Terry always made sure that I was placed in good matches and helped me understand what was expected of me while I was there. He was always positive and was always giving me positive feedback. He also paid me one of the best compliments that I ever received while working in WCW with the other two greatest compliments coming from Arn.

One night Terry came up to me in front of a couple of the other boys and said that I was “one the most underused talents” on the WCW roster. I personally thought that there were many others guys who were also being underused, but when you have as many talented guys as were under contract back then, it really is hard to get everyone over and properly utilize guys who some of the higher ups didn’t truly appreciate but who had worked for years to craft their skills. Terry took the time to let me know that he appreciated my talents and that I was one of the guys who wasn’t being used to my full potential. It was a nice compliment and I know he was being sincere when he told me this.

The other two compliments came from Arn. Arn told me one night that he and some of the other agents placed me in the same category as Bobby Eaton and Brad Armstrong. He said that, “You could work with anyone and

adjust to any style." Personally, I don't think that I could even lace Bobby or Brad's boots, as I felt like they were two of the most underrated and best workers of all time in the business. I worked with both of them and had the highest degree of respect for both men. For a veteran like Arn to say that I was being held in such high esteem as these two men was an honor to hear. Being that I had and still have so much respect for Arn, that compliment meant the world to me.

On another night, after a match with Jerry Flynn, Arn approached both of us as we came through the curtain and shook both of our hands and said, "That is the way it's done gentlemen, you two are complete professionals." I knew we had a good solid, old school match, but for Arn to be waiting for us in the back and to give me that kind of compliment, it really made me appreciate and respect myself a little more knowing that he, along with others, really did like my work and in-ring style. Thanks Arn.

Kevin and Paul also had nice things to say to me either prior to or right after several of my matches and for that I thank them as well. I always admired and respected all four of these men and, to me it was just a privilege to hear such kind words and to be respected like that by my peers. I would also like to thank Jimmy Hart as he always encouraged me and complimented me on my matches during my three years with WCW.

I do sincerely thank those men. I had respect for each of them before I had ever signed on with WCW. Kevin used to give me advice back when I was with SMW and when a guy like that takes the time to talk to you about your matches, you take it to heart. Knowing that he was actually watching my matches and was willing to take the time to give me advice was priceless. He used to talk to Chris Candido after our matches as well, and that positive reinforcement was much appreciated.

Paul Orndorff had asked me to come into WCW a few years before I eventually did. Paul is a legend in the Tampa area, as he was known for his toughness, football career, and of course his wrestling skills. So when he suggested that I come in, I originally declined, because I was having so much fun working for SMW and I loved the position that I was in there. Terry Taylor had talked to me, in person, one night in Knoxville about possibly coming into WCW way before he called me and offered me a

tryout match. I am forever thankful for these men in taking an interest in my wrestling career and giving me a break.

Defamation of character? How can it be when the person telling the story only tells the truth? You be the judge, as I don't judge others, however, I have opinions. I spoke twice with Bischoff, yes, twice in the three years I was in WCW.

The first time was the night of my tryout when he walked by and said, "Good match Louie." I took about two steps, turned and said, "Bobby. My name is Bobby Blaze." It could have been a case of mistaken identity on his behalf as several guys were trying out that night. Or my speaking up could have been a mistake, as he was the one who was giving the road agents the final approval and had the final authority to hire who they wanted on their roster.

I didn't care, as the saying goes, "I was looking for a job when I found this one," but more importantly I felt disrespected. I wanted him to know my name and who he was dealing with, me. After all, I was a man, and I had shown him respect as a man. He quickly said, "Right. Bobby. Well good match Bobby." This all took place in a matter of seconds as he was off to get ready for the live cameras as Monday Night Nitro was to go on the air as soon as the last dark match ended.

I did get hired of course. Jimmy Hart told me that my match looked good and to go find Terry as he wanted to speak with me. I personally had a lot of respect for Terry and was very happy and appreciative of the contract he offered me. I gained even more respect for Terry, as he always, always tried his best to keep me in good matches. He also always tried to keep me looking strong on the shows, especially at the World Wide Tapings at Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida.

The second time I spoke to Bischoff was about a year or so later when he told me that I had a good match that evening. He also did say, "Thanks for coming." Thanks for coming? Hell, I had been coming to every show that I was booked on. I had even shown up at a few shows I wasn't even

booked on, just to watch a house show or to hang out with some of the guys afterward. I guess I just find it funny that the two times that we spoke, no one else was around, and it was almost like he didn't want to be seen talking to a guy who wasn't one of his friends, pet projects, or an ass kisser.

Was I glad to be working for WCW? Yes. Was I happy with my contract and my bookings? Yes. Did I like Bischoff? I won't say that I personally liked Bischoff, but professionally, at first, I did like what he was trying to accomplish. He had a tough job and I understand that. I do feel like he at least tried to do his job to the best of his ability. His ability or lack thereof was limited to say the least. I didn't dislike him, I just didn't have much respect for him. I thought he was unorganized and unprofessional many times in the way he treated the wrestling business and his treatment at times towards some of the talent that worked for WCW while he was there.

Again, and I say this with much respect to the guys who worked in WCW; for me it was a great experience. There's no doubt I'm thankful to all of the ones who helped me get good bookings and to all the great talent that I got to work with in the ring. But in regards to Bischoff: How can I have respect for someone on some egotistical power trip who showed me and a bunch of others very little respect if any at all in return? The guy had a walnut sized brain and the personality of a well used dish rag and the physical courage of a weak-gutted schoolgirl. How can I have respect for someone like that? He should have remained a used car salesman.

As you can imagine, I have many stories about being on the road in WCW, and many more stories about some of the things that took place behind the scenes. I won't be able to get them all in just one chapter, because I could probably write an entire book of all the events that took place over a three year period, but here are a few of my favorites.

One of the nice things that WCW provided was catering whenever we were scheduled for a Monday Nitro, Thursday Night Thunder, or a pay-per-view. On live events like these most of the boys were expected to be at the building by one or two o'clock in the afternoon. There was usually a large number of guys that were there in the back who may not have been scheduled to actually work that night and very often there were a bunch of guys I didn't even know who were in the back just in case they were

needed. So many things can happen when guys are traveling from all over the country. It's an added bonus to have guys there on a stand-by basis in case of flight delays, road construction, or someone being a no-show.

There were also so many other things that needed to be taken care of prior to going live, ie: interviews, promos, photo shoots, and autograph signings. Most shows didn't start until 7:30, beginning with a couple of "dark matches." The dark matches were usually guys that may have been getting a tryout for the company that night, or sometimes the dark matches consisted of local guys that were known and WCW would use them on a nightly basis whenever we came to their hometown. The dark matches were also used to liven up the crowd and get the fans ready and hopefully excite them before going live at 8:00. So, as you can see there was a lot of time before the matches began and that's why I always enjoyed it when catering was available.

It was during catering when I could catch up with someone I hadn't seen for awhile, meet and greet with some of the local guys that I already knew who weren't under contract, or just have a nice meal with a few of the boys that I usually traveled with on the road. Hey, it's a free meal, you might as well enjoy it. It was during catering when one of the funniest things I had ever heard happened to me.

One afternoon I was standing in line with Booker T as we were getting some grub. I have the utmost respect for Booker T and think he is a tremendous performer and athlete. After we loaded up our plates and got our drinks I just moseyed on over to the table and had a seat where he was going to sit. We joined a table that had Booker's brother, Stevie Ray, Pez Whatley, and Rocky King. Now, if you know these gentlemen, and I'm sure most do, you'll know that they are all black. Having grown up in a predominantly black neighborhood, and having played some junior college basketball, I was used to being around guys that had a little different skin color than myself, so I fit right in or so I thought.

Being the only white boy at the table, it's not what you may think. That wasn't the problem at all, not that there were any problems. As we were sitting there, the conversation was about NASCAR. I'm not the one

who brought the subject up, as it was already being discussed prior to Booker and myself having a seat.

The previous week, the NASCAR race in Daytona had to be canceled due to heavy smoke from a recent outbreak of brush fires in the surrounding area. This much I already knew, as we had been down in Orlando the previous week for the World Wide taping. The World Wide tapings took place about every three months and while I was with WCW they took place at Universal Studios. Usually, I would fly into Orlando and stay there for about ten to twelve days at a time working on average about every other day or sometimes two or three times in one day if need be. Usually it was just luck of the draw if I didn't work every day for all ten days.

Anyway, back to the story at hand. Stevie Ray is talking about the races being canceled as said. I am just eating, minding my own business, when it dawns on me that the other four guys are not only just talking about a canceled race, but they are all seriously talking NASCAR. I can't believe this, and I think to myself, "I'm here at a table, with four brothers, and I'm the only white guy, and they know more about NASCAR than me." I mean, I knew about it and watched races and knew who some of the drivers were, and even knew some of the numbers on the side of the cars, but that's about it. I only knew about the race being canceled the previous week due to the fact that I had been in Florida at the time.

Of course, I knew who Dale Earnhardt was, and believe it or not, I had just seen him on a flight that I was on as I finished up on a Sunday night from being at Universal Studios the previous week, and I guess he was heading back to Charlotte, after his big race had been canceled. We made eye contact and acknowledged each other while waiting in line for our flight but he looked about as tired as me. I didn't want to bother him about getting his autograph. I'm not much on collecting autographs, but that one is surely one I would have liked to have gotten, especially had I known how his fabulous career would be over in a few short years.

So Stevie continues to talk as the others listen when I just say out loud, "What's wrong with this picture? I'm the only white guy here and you guys all know about NASCAR, and know way more than I do. What's up with that?" They all look at me and just kind of smile and say that they are all

fans, as I question why aren't there any black NASCAR drivers. "Ah man. Don't get him started Bobby," I hear Booker say from behind me in his seat. Well, let me tell you, Stevie Ray is a huge NASCAR fan and goes on and on with his rant about why there are no black drivers. We all had a good laugh, as this was just one funny moment for me while working for WCW.

I truly have a lot of respect for the guys that I mentioned eating with during catering. I usually ate with The Armstrong Brothers, as I had known them since our many days back in SMW, but this was one of my favorite memories from my times in WCW. There were just so many good guys that worked for WCW during my three years there.

Meng (Haku) is the Man, and The Barbarian is a close second. These two guys are as tough and as legit as they come. Anyone who is anyone in professional wrestling knows that Meng is the man. Meng and Barb are two of the toughest men, I've ever met in my life, and I have met more than a few tough guys. I felt very fortunate that these two men had both taking a liking to me, and my respect for them was honored with their friendship. I can honestly say as tough as they were in and out of the ring, they were two of the nicest men that you would ever want to meet as well. They were trained professionals and they had no time to go around and pretend to be tough, everyone just knew that they were tough. Most of the time, well, more times than not, tough guys don't have to brag or boast, or don't have much to say for that matter, they just know. But, when these guys do speak, it is always worth listening. I always listened to any suggestions or ideas that they offered. I dare say that Meng and Barb may have been the most respected guys in the WCW locker room while I was there.

On many occasions, I was glad these two men liked me. I know for sure each respected my work style and my attitude towards being a professional. Having their respect, and the respect of some of the other 'boys' meant the world to me, as I always prided myself on my work in the ring. I always tried to have a good match with whoever the office had me working with on any given night.

One night for a Thursday Night Thunder, I worked with a young David Flair. He, of course, is the son of Ric Flair, and was a good kid, but really green at this point in his life and more than one person had asked me to take care of him during our upcoming match. Even a road agent who was really close to him told me, “The less you give him, the better the match will be.” I had no problem with taking care of him in the ring. He listened, and did a good job of selling what I was dishing out. Actually he had no choice, I knew what was expected of me.

Basically, I was to beat him down, kick him to a corner, and while I was in the corner, looking down on him and stomping, Meng would make his way down to the ring, and when I looked up, Meng would put the “Tongan Death Grip” on me, leaving me immobilized. All the while young David Flair would be unaware of this and as he got up dazed and confused, he would see me there and apply the famous figure four leg-lock that his famous father had won many of his matches and titles with, as I lay prone from the earlier Death Grip that Meng had applied.

Hey, Pin me, pay me. I took it as a win-win situation as the toughest guy in the locker room had actually beaten me. Upon arriving back in the locker room several others thought the same thing, and they told me, “That match there was as good as a victory. You got beat by Meng, not by Flair.” Many others, including the office, thanked me many times over for taking such good care of young David Flair that night. I of course, thanked a very respectful David, and then immediately went to thank Meng for such a strong finish. Even though I had lost the match, the finish kept me looking strong. It was just another day at the office as far as I was concerned, as all I was doing was being a professional and doing my job.

I was recently speaking with Barbarian at a show and as always with a hug and a hand shake I thanked him for always being so good to me while I was with him in WCW. We shared many flights in and out of Charlotte, North Carolina, and as with most of my flights, I had to catch a connecting flight out of either Charlotte, or Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I spoke to him about the many times that we used to play basketball down in Florida while doing the WCW World Wide tapings at Universal Studios. Barb, Bobby

Eaton, The Stro, myself, and a few others used to all stay at the same hotel and in the evenings we would all play either “21” or two-on-two out on the basketball courts. The Barbarian is really a good basketball player and we used to have a blast playing nightly.

I also spoke to Barb about one night, back in the day, when I know for sure that he and Meng had spoken up on my behalf. I thanked them then, and I thanked The Barbarian again on this day as I recalled the story.

One night my name was on the “white board” to face Big Scott “Flash” Norton for the upcoming WCW Saturday Night tapings. He got the nickname “Flash” from how quickly he would beat his opponents in arm wrestling on his way to winning over thirty championships, including four US Championships. Norton was also a big star over in Japan for New Japan Pro Wrestling and was known for his stiff in-ring wrestling style. He was and is one big, strong man, and he usually beat his wrestling rivals in a flash, just as he did in arm wrestling.

The night I was scheduled to work with Flash was the night after he had been on Monday Nitro and he was fresh off a defeat, having had to put some former world karate champion over. Flash had, with his size, power, and fighting skills basically beat the shit outta the guy and then took a “super-kick” as the finish and took the pin.

Someone had taken a picture of the kick, the only move the karate champ in question executed, and had given him a copy. Anyway, the next night, the night that I was to work with Scott, this guy is running around showing anyone who will look at the picture, and telling everyone how "he had won! He had beaten Scott Norton, of the NWO."

Hey idiot, it's a work. You didn't beat anyone. If anything, you got your ass handed to ya, and then he took your kick for the finish to get your sorry ass over. Yes, that was said in my sarcastic voice. Then and now!

Scott wasn't in the building at this point. Everyone who knew Scott, and knew how to work, also knew that if he had been there, this wouldn't be happening. I could see some of the guys that I knew, who knew Scott better than me, chomping at the bit to relay this guy's actions to him as soon as he hit the building. I thought to myself, "This isn't gonna be a fun night for me. He'll probably take his frustrations out on me in the ring. Great."

Having known both parties involved, the only way that the karate guy even got the kick off was because Scott had fed into it after giving him the beating prior to taking the kick as the finish. I had previously worked with the karate expert on two separate occasions. The first time I had to beat him down with stiff forearms to the back to keep him from trying to "come back" too soon and also to help him understand how to better get over by learning "to sell" a little bit. The second time that I worked with him, I took him down with a "double-leg take down" in a match in which he tried to inform me that, "The bosses don't want me to take any bumps or leave my feet." My ass! A wrestling match in which he wasn't supposed to leave his feet. Oh, I forgot, this is a television show we're trying to sell, not a wrestling show. Yes, I hope you once again sensed my sarcasm.

I was trying to work with him and when I felt that he was trying to take advantage of me by not "selling" my stuff, I took that personally and felt disrespected. Being the nice guy that I am, I simply took him off his feet and whispered in his ear, "We can fight, fuck, or work. Your choice," as I held him down on the mat.

Oh, how soon one forgets when (A) it's a work and (B) when a wrestler takes a karate guy to the mat, the karate guy can't throw or get

those kicks off, especially if the wrestler isn't feeding into them. He was screaming like a little bitch about letting him up and how he would work.

Once I let him up, we completed the match with no more problems. He beat me with the same kick that he would eventually use on Flash Norton. You know what? "Pin me, pay me." I was scheduled to be off TV for awhile to leave for Vancouver, Canada to do some work for EA Sports. I was one of the four wrestlers scheduled to help shoot the motion capture moves for the upcoming wrestling video game, "Mayhem."

Anyway, after this match, when I went to check in with the road agents, I opened the door to the "war room" and the agents just had smiles on their faces, as they told me that the match was good, and that was a nice takedown. I recall that several guys in the locker room made comments and a few others were still talking about it the next morning at the airport. It was funny to them as well, as they knew how this guy was and what kind of attitude he had, so they were happy that I showed him just how easy a wrestler could take him and his karate skills off his feet. It kind of became a running joke between me and a couple of the boys who also had less than kind feelings towards him and his attitude.

Back to the story about the match between Norton and myself. In the locker room, and roaming the halls, the karate guy was busy showing off his photo of his karate kick to anyone that would take a look at it. It was just a matter of time before big Scott would arrive at the building for the show.

By this time, several of the big man's friends were already planning to tell him about how the goof was bragging about the picture. Well, indeed, once the big man walked into the building, he saw red. I personally witnessed the confrontation in the hallway right beside the locker room in Rock Hill, South Carolina, that night. I saw exactly what took place as the karate guy was down on his knees begging like a little school girl, saying that he was only joking around, and that he would even, "Tear the picture up, if you just let me up and don't hurt me." That was pretty much the end of the altercation. Quick and to the point, this guy, along with many others knew that Scott was not someone to mess with if you pissed him off.

Now Scott being Scott, he was still a little hot over all this, especially since he had been ‘beat’ on the show the night before. When he saw who he would be working that night, he just stood there looking at the white board, and then turned and stormed out of the locker room. I’m sure he was still fuming over having to put over someone less worthy the previous night, and having to catch flack about it from his friends, and how the guy had been bragging. I was sure that the little incident in the hall added to his frustration, and that he was going to take his frustrations out on me that night in the ring.

I had spent many hours with Meng and The Barbarian and I think they too sensed that whoever was going to face Scott that night would have his work cut out for him. That someone was me. I was dressing right across from them and I guess they saw the concern on my face as I sat there lacing up my boots. I wasn’t scared, but I was concerned about just how stiff tonight’s match was going to be and if Scott was going to be willing to work with me, as he had left the room as soon as he saw my name on the board beside his. I wasn’t sure if he left because he was mad upon seeing it or if it was because he knew that he could go out and have a good match with me without any attitude from me, and because he knew that I could work.

Two things were apparent in the locker room at this time. One, he was still pissed off, and two, I was concerned. I also noticed that at some point Meng and Barb were no longer in the locker room. I have no idea what may or may not have been said out in the hallway that evening but I do recall how I felt as I stood in the back, at the “gorilla spot.”

The gorilla spot is the area in the back right beside the curtain, before you step out in front of the live audience and TV cameras. It’s the position you’re in when the music starts, and you know you’re about to get your cue to step out into the spotlight.

Right before the music started, Scott looked up at me and said, “Work hard out there and work stiff. You know I work stiff so give me everything you got.” I just nodded my head and knew that everything would be alright once we would lock up in the ring.

I had trained with Scott a couple of times in the gym. We had worked out a couple of days prior to a pay-per-view that we were both scheduled to be on a few months earlier. I didn't use the same amount of weight that he used obviously, but I did keep up with him throughout the workout. The man could handle some serious weight, and he was intense while we trained. I really admired how he handled the huge amount of weights and I liked the workout that he put me through while training. I used to always write down the workouts and workout ideas that I got from some of the guys that I had the privilege to train with in the gym. Fans would not believe how hard professional wrestlers train in the weight room. I really picked up some good workout routines, and got some good ideas about training from many of these professionals through the years. Some of these routines are just unreal, and the weights or the amount of weight that some of these guys move around is unheard of in your local gym, I can assure you of that.

I don't know if it was because I had worked out with Scott in the gym a few times, or if he knew that I had been to Japan as well, and didn't mind working stiff, or if someone had said something to him about going out and having a good match with me, or if was a combination of the three, but it was obvious to me that he was willing to go out and work with me by the time the music started and I made my way to the ring.

I knew that the match would be stiff, but I was just hoping that he wasn't going to take his frustrations that he had towards the idiot karate guy out on me. He didn't. He was a complete professional. We had a really good match, with me doing a bunch of wrestling moves, moving around him with my quickness before he would eventually catch me off guard and over power me and take over the match. We worked together, stiff or snug, as he had requested and he eventually cut me off and gave me his big "power bomb" finish. He laid me out nice and flat, 1, 2, 3, and it was all over. Pin me, pay me, I had survived. I sold the move as the big man got his massive, famous arm raised in victory, and rightfully so, as he was getting a bigger push than myself. He needed the victory to keep him strong to regain some of his steam to keep his push moving along especially coming off his recent defeat from the night before. I knew my job, and I knew how to do it well.

Once I stepped back behind the curtain after the match, I was waiting on Flash to thank him for taking care of me during the match and also for the match. It's a professional courtesy to always thank the guy that you worked with as well as thanking the ref and anyone else that may have been involved in your match. I always prided myself on taking the time to thank everyone, even the boys in the locker room for being on the show. Always take the time to thank those that helped you get on the show and show your respect to the other guys in the locker room. It's one of the keys to being a true professional.

As Flash walked back towards the area in which I was waiting, I didn't even get the words out before he said, "Hey Bobby, thanks, that was a one of the best matches I've had in a while." I thanked him as well. Once we made our way to the "war room," I thanked Arn and told him everything went fine during the match and I made sure to let him know that the big man had taken care of me during our match. When I returned to the locker room Meng and Barb both gave me a look that told me they had indeed spoken to Flash in regards to my match with him beforehand. I got up off the bench that I had been sitting on and shook their hands and thanked them both. They knew why and what for without saying anything as to my giving them an extra thank you. When I recently spoke with The Barbarian, I recalled this particular night and thanked him again for speaking up for me that night with Scott Norton. He was meek and mild as he just said a simple, "You're welcome. Scott was hot that night and all we did was kindly ask him to 'Take care of Bobby, he's a good guy and a good worker.'" I again shook his hand and said thanks. It's nice to be respected by your peers and even nicer when guys like The Barbarian and Meng respect you enough to have your back.

Again, thank goodness this business is a work. If it wasn't, it would be like Scott Armstrong once said during a meal at catering: "If this business wasn't a work, Meng and Barbarian would just walk into the ring and beat the hell out of everyone and take all the belts. Nobody would have a job then, because no one would ever want to fight either of them in a shoot. The business would just shut down." We all had a good laugh about that, but it's the truth. Two legit tough guys for sure.

The professional wrestling business is a work to draw money. Money is the bottom line of any business and the wrestling business at the time had an ongoing “wrestling war” taking place between WCW and WWF, now WWE. It was known as, “The Monday Night War,” as each of these two companies were competing against each other in a ratings war on television each week to see who could outdraw the other for the better ratings. This was the Raw versus Nitro era. The better the ratings, the better the money for that company. Competition makes everyone push themselves harder.

Most of the guys at WCW understood this, and most knew exactly what their role was within the company. I knew my role. I knew and accepted my place on the roster before signing my contract. My role would be that of, “talent enhancement.” I wasn’t there to “do jobs.” Yes, as mentioned I had done a few jobs back in the early 90’s for the WWF and I considered it an honor to get to work with some of the great ones like Rowdy Roddy Piper, Tito Santana, and Kerry Von Erich in order to gain experience and get exposure. There’s nothing wrong with doing a job for someone, but there is a difference between “doing a job” and “putting someone over.” I only had two squash matches in three years while working for WCW. My job in WCW as talent enhancement was to help develop younger guys, especially those from the “Power Plant,” which was where many of the guys during this time trained to break into wrestling for WCW. I was also there to help “get over” established guys for their upcoming pushes, a big match on Monday Night Nitro, or to set them up, by making them look good for an upcoming pay-per-view event. I knew and understood this as Terry Taylor had told me one night, “Bobby, we’ll have guys for you to beat on certain nights to keep you strong, and there’ll be guys, some not as talented as you, that you’ll have to put over and probably even have to get them over in doing so.” I completely understood this and respected this kind of honesty.

I was understanding more and more that the company, WCW, was a TV show for the most part that included wrestling, not just a wrestling show that had a TV program. There’s a difference. Those who know will understand that statement. During this time period in addition to the “Monday Night Wars,” in the ratings game, WCW also had televised events such as WCW Saturday Night, which I was often a part of, Thursday Night

Thunder, and WCW World Wide. The WWF, in addition to RAW had, Smackdown, and the WWF Superstars programs on the air. Professional wrestling held six of the top ten programs that were being aired on cable television during this time, plus each company held a monthly pay-per-view event. I had appeared on many of these shows, I think it's safe to say that I had become a millionaire in the amount of people that were entertained through my wrestling skills. I may not have been a millionaire in money, but I was a millionaire in the number of fans, acquaintances, and friends that I met throughout the world.

Again, it was through my wrestling skills that I was lucky enough to achieve my goals and live my dream as a full-time professional wrestler. During this time period there was a statistic that had been printed in several of the wrestling magazines, which hold about as much truth as the Internet. You know the one. "If you read it on the internet, it must be true," except in this case it was true, that the number of guys living off being a professional wrestler was only about 460 guys. I was lucky enough to be one of them. Wow! That number included about 150 or so guys that WCW had under contract and some that did regular televised events, as well as those that were in The WWF, Mexico, Japan, and a few other places around the world. This was and is impressive to think that out of 460 people making a living, not just in the US, but worldwide, as a professional wrestler, I was indeed in with an elite group of individuals. I did achieve something with my life and for that, I am proud.

I am also proud of the fact that for several years I was listed in Pro Wrestling Illustrated's annual Top 500 List. My highest ranking was Number 109 back in 1996, following the year that I had "upset" Jerry "The King" Lawler to become the SMW Champ. That ranking along with a few other top rankings never really impressed me, as those rankings never paid the bills, but by being recognized, I stayed booked and that landed me nightly or weekly payouts that in turn paid the bills. For over fifteen years, and that's a long time in the wrestling business, I was able to make a comfortable living. I sure do miss those checks and I miss the Fed-Ex truck that used to bring my check every two weeks signed by one Mr. Ted Turner, and believe you me, Ted Turner's checks don't bounce. They just stop arriving when your contract expires!

Turner

One CNN Center
Atlanta, GA 30345-5366

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLI
(404) 603-3123

DATE	CHECK NO.
02/11/99	003205

BU-6010 IN-0000032799

DATE	INVOICE/CREDIT MEMO	TYPE	DESCRIPTION	GROSS	DISCOUNT	NET
01/31/99	PE013199			2,849.32	0.00	2,849.32
			TOTAL	$2,849.32	$0.00	$2,849.32

THE ATTACHED CHECK IS IN PAYMENT FOR THE ITEMS DESCRIBED ABOVE.

Bobby takes a sidewalk slam from trainee Death Falcon Zero

ten

England Tour

“The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.” William Blake

Shortly after the expiration of my contract with WCW, I was back on the road trying to make a living doing what I loved, wrestling. I had been in WCW for close to three years, and I saw the writing on the wall. The company had about 150 guys under contract, and that number was soon cut to around 75. After the first cuts, the next number dropped from 75 down to 50 guys rather quickly. I had once again made that cut. To be one of only 50 guys officially under contract was like walking or crawling on a thin razor as you never knew just when you’re just gonna be cut, or killed off. I could see the whole shit house going up in smoke and I knew it would only be a matter of time before I would be released. When the next cut was made they took the roster down to 42. I was one of the last eight guys that was officially released.

I actually take pride in the fact that I was one of the last guys under contract to be released. From my understanding, one of the people from Turner Sports, a financial adviser, came in and had a list of names and their salaries, and how many dates they were to work per year based on that salary. He began releasing the talent without even knowing anything about the person. The next cut they made went from 42 wrestlers down to 25. When there were only about 25 or so guys left under contract, some of those guys either stayed on and worked their dates, or stayed home and collected fat checks and did nothing. Others went to work for Vince and the WWE, and of course, eventually VKM and his huge company ended up buying the entire company for a small percentage of what it was worth. He and the WWE now own the entire wrestling library of tapes, films, rights, etc. to all the old NWA, WCW and other companies.

What can you say? VKM, whether you like him, love him, hate his product, the WWE, or love “Sports Entertainment,” over traditional

professional wrestling, the man is a genius. Personally, I hate “sports entertainment!” However, I do not blame VKM for what he has done, nor do I dislike him in any way, shape or form. I certainly have respect for VKM. He’s a business man who runs a highly profitable company.

Being fresh off national television, I could have charged quite a bit more money than what I was asking for per booking. I chose not to do what some guys did by charging some outrageous fee for a rare appearance or matches. Instead I kept my booking fee very reasonable, thus asking a little less than some of the other boys were charging. Trust me, I wasn’t getting nearly what I could have requested, I just wanted to stay busy and have as many bookings and matches as I could get. I enjoyed the travel and I enjoyed the wrestling business. It was exciting to be back on the independent scene, where I could pick and choose where, when, and how often I wanted to work.

Soon after my release I returned to Japan once again and had yet another really good tour there. Once again I got to work and travel with my buddies Willie and Chad, and all the other talented guys in Michinoku Pro Wrestling. I also met Joe Kimble “Parraruso,” who was also on this tour. “Parraruso” means “Russian Dog” and this was a gimmick name he had used in Mexico and out on the west coast. Joe had a great body and was a hard worker. This particular tour lasted three or four weeks. When I returned home, I took some more indie bookings, ran a few shows, and yet again went back to Japan. It was during the end of this Japan tour that Joe had told me he had been in contact with a promoter in England who was interested in bringing in some American guys for his next tour. I told Joe that I was most definitely interested in going to England.

I came home for a week after being on a tour of Japan, and immediately went on a vacation with my family to visit my grandmother and family in Baltimore. While there I stayed in contact with Joe and a promoter in England named Scott Conway. After being home, well actually not home but in the US, I returned to Ashland and within a week I was off to tour England. I had agreed to what would be a twenty-eight day tour and once again I was off to do what I loved, wrestling. I was going to see

England with Joe and Chad who were also scheduled to be on the tour. It was an exciting time to say the least.

The travel in wrestling can be as brutal as the actual in-ring wrestling if not more so at times. This was indeed one of those times. Think about this for a second, I had gone from my home in Kentucky to Japan, stayed and worked several weeks, traveling every day, working out, and doing matches every night, took a week off, and then traveled to England.

Upon arrival in England I was now faced with another twenty-eight days of constant travel. Some weeks I did double shots, working on an afternoon show, and then another one that evening with no days off to rest and recover. This type of lifestyle really takes a toll on your body, the aches and pains are real and your body sure lets you know it every morning upon arising. I have no complaints, as this was the life and lifestyle I had chosen and I not only loved it, I thrived on it. Once you step through that curtain each night, see and hear that crowd, you get an adrenaline rush like no other, and all those aches and pains subside. You are so psyched up, you forget about that sore knee, hip, or elbow, and you go out there and do your job. Wrestle!

I got off the plane in London, traveled another two hours to the Southampton area and was back in the ring later that evening. I had an opening match with a young man, named James Mason, to establish myself, and to also set up that night's main even with Chad. James always did some kind of masked gimmick in the first match before coming back out and working as himself later in the show. He was a good piece of talent. I must have been running on pure adrenaline, having been in so many different time zones in such a short period of time and it wasn't until the next evening while traveling via a ferry over to the Isle of Wight that I really realized that I was even in England. Time was just moving way to fast. Once I reached the locker room I took some time to sit back, relax, and get caught up on everything that had been going on with my friends, Joe and Chad. It was such a blur up until that point. Life seemed to be moving at warp speed.

While sitting in this building talking, reflecting, and just trying to digest everything, several thoughts unrelated to wrestling entered my mind.

I thought about how I had heard about Jimi Hendrix, along with many other great bands back around 1970 at a big festival on The Isle of Wight. I realized I wasn't in the same building but we were on the western side of the Isle where the concerts had taken place. I also had noticed that the building was a round structure with the stage area, or in this case the ring, out in the middle with ringside seats available. The other seats were on the sides in a circular design that spiraled upward. There wasn't a bad seat in the house as all of them over looked the ring or stage area. This made me think about how many great plays must have taken place here through the years. I know it wasn't The Globe Theatre in London, but it sure put me in a state of mind about just how much rich history I was being exposed to. You can read about history in books, but to have a chance to actually travel, and be exposed to some of the places my life had taken me was the best education ever. I had the opportunity to travel the world through my wrestling skills. Amazing!

Now, don't get me wrong I wasn't living a rich life in dollars and cents, but I sure was living a rich life of experiences. After a bit, another wrestler walked into the dressing room and I immediately recognized him as Robbie Brookside. I shook his hand and introduced myself, as he did the same. This is customary in any professional locker room. It's expected! This is done as a sign of common courtesy and to show respect. After we exchanged a few words it was time for us both to have a good laugh. Robbie and I had previously met each other back in my days at WCW while he was at some of the World Wide tapings in Orlando. After our brief exchange and getting caught up on how everything had been going for each other, the next thing out of my mouth was, "Robbie, I do believe you owe me a beer." We both chuckled. He looked a little dumbfounded at first, and then I told him that I heard through the grapevine that while he was on tour in Germany and I was still in WCW he once told a mutual friend of ours, "If I see Bobby Blaze, if I ever see him again, I'll buy him a beer for kicking out of Alex Wright's finish."

This was in reference to me actually kicking out on a two count and rolling out of the ring on a WCW Saturday Night program a couple years earlier. After taking a half-assed German Suplex from Alex I kicked out right at the end of a two-count. It damn near cost me my job. I hadn't really

been in WCW very long when it took place, but having worked in territories, where it was important to remain strong after taking a pin, to at least raise your shoulders off the mat after the three count. This is done so it looks like if you had just one more second you would have kicked out and maybe even still been able to make a comeback and maybe even win. This is also done so people, or at least your fans, would still believe in you and your chances of winning future matches. I knew I needed to kick out to stay strong right after a three count. I had actually kicked out on two and rolled out of the ring.

Believe you me, I heard about it from the office, once I got back to the war room. I recall Terry Taylor speaking to me about my kicking out of the finish, as Arn Anderson listened in. They both were very professional in making me aware of what I had done. I respect men who are straight shooters. They were both professional in addressing the issue and respectful to me as to why it was important to take the pin as this was TV, not a territory. They were understanding and forgiving because they knew why I had done it. They also further explained that it was important for me to take a guy's finish, stay down for the full three count and help them get over, and in turn, I would have guys doing the same for me. They didn't have to tell me twice. I understood their reasoning.

But in my defense, I must say, that ice cold draft beer that Robbie bought me that night made it all worthwhile. I also recall being in the ring with Robbie that night and remember just how smooth a worker Robbie truly was. He was one of a handful of talented guys who were on this tour. In addition to Chad, Joe, and myself, there were Robbie, James Mason, and brothers Mike and Dave Waters, who both were big and strong. One had been a former World's Strongest Man competitor. There was also a big German guy named Martin, who had tons of talent to go along with a great attitude about learning how to be a better wrestler and worker. There were a couple other guys and even though I can't recall their names, I remember that they worked hard and took pride in their work. There was an Irish guy with an accent so thick that I never did know his last name, I just knew him as Paddy. The crew that worked for Scott and sometimes another English promoter, Brian Dixon, were all very talented wrestlers and workers. It was pleasure to have been in the ring with each and every one of them.

Chad, Joe, and myself had some really good matches with each other and we all seemed to work well with the other guys on the tour. We stayed out at a little motor lodge and traveled by cab to the gym in the mornings and then would usually get a bite to eat before heading back to our room where our ride would pick us up to head out for the evening matches. Most of the towns we worked in were only a couple hours away so the road trips were pretty easy for the most part. Most of the venues had a bar with some of the best beer I've ever had. I'd have a couple beers with Robbie or Paddy before heading out to the restaurant for dinner with Scott, Chad and Joe.

Every Tuesday we would catch the ferry over to the Isle of Wight, so that trip was a little longer because of the ferry ride. On Thursdays we would travel to Torquary, which is a beach resort type town that is also known as The English Riviera. This was always a great little trip and the crowds there were usually pretty good. Many of the fans were families coming in from a day at the beach to catch the wrestling action. We would get there early and we had time to just walk around, take in some sun and enjoy the beach. One day while walking around the beach I met a couple of young lesbians, good looking ones I might add, and I ended up hanging out with them watching them. I watched them make out and tease each other in a secluded area, with their approval of course, as I'd never spy on such lewd behavior without an invite. They were pretty fun to hang out with for the day before going to the venue to wrestle later that evening. They seemed to enjoy my company as much as I enjoyed theirs. What can I say? I'm a people person. Being the people person and people watcher I am, I had no choice but to take full advantage of my voyeuristic ways.

On days that I had a double shots, two matches on the same day in different towns or cities, the first one or first show was usually at some sort of family resort where families would either be taking day trips or were on "holiday" as they call vacations in England. Each of these places had a nice recreational venue or building that would provide entertainment during the lunch hours or in the middle of the day for the guests. These places would be packed, mostly with kids on holiday with their family, and they all seemed to really enjoy the wrestling.

It was at one of these places that the MC introduced me as “Blobby” Blaze, and although it was his job to help get the crowds worked up and get them and keep them involved in the matches, it really pissed me off. I was scheduled to work with Chad on this show. As I entered the ring this guy just kept getting all the kids riled up by chanting, “Blobby, Blobby,” over and over again. I know he was doing his job, but it was really getting annoying to me, especially while we tried to start the match. Well, never one to keep my mouth shut, I just stopped cold, right after the first couple of minutes of action, and I stepped out of the ring, walked over and grabbed the house mic from this guy and started my verbal assault on him.

I don’t know who was in more shock, Chad, as he was left standing in the ring, not knowing whether to laugh, come out to get me back in the ring, or to just wait. He knew me pretty well and knew how I was, so he stayed there trying not to laugh. Maybe the young fans or their parents were even more shocked, but it was hard to tell, as they may have thought it was all just a part of the show. Then again, the most shocked was probably the college kid who was just happy to have a summer job working at a summer camp and resort. He sat there wide-eyed and shaking as I let him have it, verbally blasting the poor bastard. I grabbed the mic, and said, “Listen you flaming, dripping, homo, my name is Bobby! Bobby Blaze, either you get it right or you sit your ass down right over there and keep your mouth shut!”

By now Chad was trying to get me back in the ring, yelling and challenging me to get in there to fight him. The young guy was sitting there scared out of his wits, frightened as hell. I’m sure the promoter and the boys in the back were wondering what was going on out in the ring as the parents and kids had all gotten real quiet. Again, they were probably wondering if this was all a part of the show, or if I was just a rude American. It didn’t matter to me, I was just pissed off for whatever reason and really had kind of cracked and taken it out on the MC. Finally, I got back in the ring, and of course Chad, being the professional that he is called the rest of the match and helped get the crowd back into the match. He eventually beat me via pin. Pin me! Pay me! I still have another match later tonight. This of course, made everyone happy that the prick wrestler got his just deserts.

The match actually turned out to be a good solid one. Chad always worked hard and always brought out the best in me during our matches. I had worked with him so many times in Japan, and I knew and trusted that he would lead us through the match. After the finish, the fans booed me and cheered for Chad. I went to the back, changed clothes and went out and got myself a bottle of Captain Morgan's and a coke and began drinking while waiting for the show to end before we would have to travel another two hours to the next town for the evening show.

I drank the entire way over to the next town, finishing the bottle I might add, and then I got out of the van, walked right into the venue where the other promoter already had the ring set up, climbed up into it and passed out. I just lay there and slept, and I'm sure my snoring was quite amusing. I knew beforehand that there was at least a couple hours before the show was to begin, and I knew I had time to sleep it off, so that's exactly what I did.

The next thing I remember was, Scott standing over me, waking me up and telling me that the doors would be opening in a few minutes. "Maybe you should go get ready for the show." I woke up feeling fine, no hangover, no headache, but fully refreshed and ready to go. I really don't know what happened that day to put me in such a bad mood. I'm not sure if it was just the constant travel, the guy calling me Blobby, or if I was just missing home and my family. Regardless, I had gotten it out of my system and went out that night and worked another good match, this time with Robbie. I also went back out and won a 10 man Battle Royal in the main event. Afterwards I had a couple beers and then went out to dinner with the crew.

It had been a strange day indeed. Even though I had a little bit of a bad attitude during the afternoon show, and had a bit to drink in between the two shows, took a nap, and worked another match, competed and won a battle royal, I will say my matches didn't suffer one bit. Not only did I have good performers like Chad and Robbie to work with, there was no way that I was going to let the fans down by giving them anything less than my best while I was in the ring. I'm not justifying my behavior or attitude that day by any means, but at least my performance in the ring was spot on and I was able to pull off good matches even on one of my worst days.

That was the only time that I drank during the day. On most of the other days we would hit the gym then go out to eat breakfast, which you didn't want to miss if at all possible. The traditional English breakfast usually consisted of bacon, sausage, eggs, with a variety of sides like mushrooms, baked beans, black pudding, which from my understanding was leftover mashed potatoes that were fried up, and sometimes some leftover veggies like onions that were fried or browned inside the potatoes, or sometimes simple hash browns, and a couple of fried or grilled tomato slices. Fried bread or toast with butter, washed down with a mug of tea, made this one hell of a breakfast. You don't want to miss breakfast, that's for sure. I usually enjoyed this type of meal either at one of the local bed and breakfast establishments or at a pub, as many pubs served this type of meal as an all day breakfast. Breakfast was sometimes referred to as a, "fry up" as most everything, if not all of the foods served, were fried and very filling.

England had some really enjoyable food choices. I usually ate at one of the local pubs for lunch as a friend of mine from back home who had visited England told me that you would get a good portion for a fair price by eating at the pubs. You would get a good portion of a meat, like chicken, beef, or pork, served with several good side dishes along with bread. These meals would remind me of some of my grandmother's big Sunday dinners. I usually had tea with my meals, but would occasionally have a nice cold draft beer.

Fish and chips are a traditional English dish, and it goes without saying I had my share of fish and chips while I was there. You could find a restaurant or a fish and chip stand in just about every place we traveled, and the fish and chips were always delicious. A large portion of the working class people would have this meal for lunch, sometimes several times per week, and I was no different from them, other than the fact that I wrestled for a living. I ordered the fish and chips often and don't think I was ever disappointed in my order size, the price, or the taste. Some of these restaurants or shops have been around for over a hundred and fifty years, so they must be doing something right to stay in business for that length of time. It's so nice to just step up to the counter at one of the many shops, place your order, and within minutes, your fish and chips would be handed

to you, fresh, hot, and ready to eat. They would serve the fish wrapped in newspaper. The newspaper would absorb most of the grease, but greasy or not, it was enjoyable. The battered fish would be hot, as they usually fried it right there while you waited and served it to you fast. Hot or not, it was just too good not to eat it as quickly as it was handed to you.

I wasn't making killer money while in England, and one has to eat, and with the prices being so reasonable for the portion size served it was well worth spending some of my earnings to eat well just about every day I was there. Again, after the matches, it was time for a cold draft beer, and either a quick sandwich as we traveled back to our hotel, or Scott would take us to some nice Chinese or Indian restaurant for a delicious evening meal.

All the traveling, the matches, again, sometimes two shows on Sundays, or two matches on the same card, as an opening match to "get over strong," or to set up that evening's main event, seemed to be taking its toll on my body. After being in Japan, and going right over to tour England with so little break in between it seemed to be aging my body quickly. I could just feel the wear and tear of the daily grind.

I wouldn't go back and change one thing, and as said, I would do it all over again, and even more of it. When I returned home from England I felt as if someone had just tied me to a tree and beat me with a baseball bat. "Beat on the brat, beat on the brat, beat on the brat with a baseball bat, oh yeah, oh yeah, uh-oh" by The Ramones kept running through my head often as this was the way my body felt. This was the way I had been treating my body for months at a time, and those months had all too soon become years.

Once I came back home to the US, I had a serious talk with my doctor. He told me point blank, "Bobby as your friend and as your doctor, you do this another ten years and you will be crippled." I knew it was time to take some time off and do some serious thinking about my future. After several months of little or no wrestling, I decided that I would return to college.

I had promised my grandmother that I would finish my education years earlier. So, I decided to finish and earn my college degree, only wrestling on weekends as I attended classes. I would wrestle on two or three weekends per month depending on the bookings that were available at the

time and how my body felt. I would also work or wrestle summer tours throughout the country at summer fairs, carnivals, and shows that I would put on for my old company, CPW.

I used guys that I had personally trained, while bringing in some of the "name guys," guys that I had known and worked with through the years who were no longer on TV, but were still working and accepting bookings. This was a lot easier on my body and wrestling was fun again. It was fun again, because I could work my shoot job during the day, take classes at night, and still work in wrestling matches.

I worked with young kids in a much needed after school program. I also had a ring set up and trained young wrestlers, trying to pass on my wrestling knowledge, and also run my personal training business. Along with wrestling, becoming a certified personal fitness trainer had been another life time goal of mine since I first started lifting weights when I was younger. Malenko had encouraged me to train others early in my career to earn extra money in between bookings. Again, his advice from many years ago was spot on. I loved training anyway, I loved helping others, so why not make a dollar or two along the way. I studied hard, reading and writing, many times on a bus or plane to become a certified personal fitness trainer. I was eventually certified through three different programs: ACE, The American Counsel on Exercise, The NFPT, National Fitness Personal Training, and another nationally known and respected personal training program called The ISSA, The International Sports Science Association. I also worked in enough time to finish my college degree in a little over two years and earned my Bachelors of Science in Organizational Communications from Ohio University.

Once I completed my BS degree, I found that I enjoyed learning and going to school so much that I furthered my education by completing my Master of Arts in Leadership In Communications from Duquesne University.

I'm probably the dumbest educated person you'll ever meet, but I do have my moments. I hope this book is a testament to some of my finest moments and that you have enjoyed reading about my life in and outside "the squared circle."

eleven

What Others Have To Say

“Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.” Coach John Wooden

Joe Malenko: The greatest legacy and compliment are those people that follow behind us that we have had any kind of positive effect on. If we can influence the future of the sport with anyone, I am proud to say I played a small part in the molding of Bobby. His ring savvy, but more importantly his respect for this business, earns him a seat at the table. And, it’s not a very big table!!

Bull Pain: To say a few words about you my friend is easy Bobby. Bobby is a great guy and good friend. He’s someone that when he walks into a dressing room makes you smile and you’re genuinely happy he is there that night. You hope when you see him, you are booked with him, because not only can he work his ass off, you will have a stellar match and a few laughs. To see Bobby in the dressing room, to me, is a breath of fresh air and always a good time. Bobby, to me, is one of those southern boys that are easy and simply amazing to work and behold in the ring. He’s a true gentlemen and hard worker. After the show he’ll drink beer and tell lies till the sun comes up. The business and the boys that were lucky enough to have crossed paths with you were truly blessed.

Mike Tussey: Once upon a time I ran into a small kid while I was coaching grade school basketball at Crabbe Elementary in Ashland, Kentucky… My memory goes back to a small skinny kid who knew what he wanted and was willing to work hard just to realize his dream. He was not only successful with basketball, but was outstanding for three years within my program. Today, that same young man has traveled around the world while following his dream of professional wrestling. He has excelled in many, many ways earning many, many victories and championship belts.

I watched him grow up at my home as he grew into a young man. His recipe for success was simple, a vision, strong values, discipline, sweat, and a never quit attitude. Today, he has memories and accomplishments that many can only dream about. He has kept his roots and lives today in his hometown. That young man is “Bobby Blaze” or more accurately Bob Smedley, a gentleman I respect. His quest to be a champion or simply THE BEST was a very rough road in which many, many would have “thrown in the towel.” Bobby Blaze made it because the word “quit” is not in his vocabulary. Enjoy his story... because the thrill of victory was his…

Teena “Lady T” Fannin: Bobby, here is the truth. I was living in Danville, Kentucky, at the time and drove four hours to watch your matches as much as I could. I believe we developed our friendship from there. I always wanted to get in the wrestling business. You are one of the most loyal friends and a trusted trainer that anyone can ask for. You took me in when no one else was willing to train me. It was either I was too thin or my hearing loss was in the way. Even though, you had thoughts of how to teach a hearing loss person, you seemed to put that aside and taught me anyway… I do remember one quote that you have said to me. “Sometimes, you gotta sit and watch and learn… all the techniques that you teach aren’t always enough.” You have taught me to have pride and respect in the wrestling business. You have such a great passion for wrestling and for the friends around you. I’ll cherish it for life. The car accident might have ended my dream, but our friendship is still there. You are a wonderful person inside and out… A terrific trainer who can be trusted. I love you my friend!

Frankie Reyes: Bobby Blaze was one of the great talents to come out of the Malenko school. He could be a technical wrestler if that was required, but if you wanted to brawl, he could brawl. He was also a high flyer and you do not see those traits in many wrestlers today.

Lord Zoltan: I believe that I first met Bobby Blaze when he came to wrestle for the USWF in Pennsylvania in the Ellwood City/New Castle/Beaver Falls area. Bobby was regularly booked against Gorgeous George III, who later went on to wrestle as The Maestro. Bobby always had one of the best matches on the card. From the first time I saw him, he was

ahead of everyone on the cards in mat skills. On the indie circuit, many guys were untrained or had very limited skills. Bobby was not one of those guys. I could always tell that he was destined to end up in one of the territories. It was always a night off when teaming with or against Bobby. He made everyone he worked with look like a superstar. He was a true consummate wrestler and a true gentleman both in and out of the ring. Wrestling was better any time Bobby was on the cards. I had only wished that our paths would have crossed more than they did.

Cueball Carmichael: Bobby was such a skilled wrestler, he could make a broom handle look great!

Death Falcon Zero: I was fortunate enough to have been trained by a true professional and a damn fine gentleman to boot, Bobby Blaze. Words fall short in expressing my gratitude and deepest admiration.

Shane Storm: Thank you for giving me the tools. I without a doubt had the best teacher around. Thank you for teaching me to be respectful and professional and how to conduct myself.

Kenny Wynn: I can’t count the number of matches I had with Bobby Blaze. But I do know they were all good ones. Win, lose, or draw, and no matter how many fans were there, he always pushed me to have a good match, and I can honestly say, they were all good ones. He may have “won” most of them, but I did beat him once, in a battle royal! Thanks whoever threw him out before I could!

the suicide blond

“Candido, you son of a ‘beep’!” I was shouting after he threw my SMW Jr Heavyweight Title into an ice cold river during the month of November right before we were to go on the Thanksgiving Thunder Tour in 1993. We were scheduled to fight for “The Turkey Title” in which the winner would get a chance to tar and feather the loser. Man, those were fun promos, but emerging from that damn ice cold water wasn’t much fun. Thankfully we got the shot of me going into and coming out of the water in one shot. This next little section will be in remembrance of Chris Candido and a few more of “the boys” who have passed away that I personally knew along the way during my years of wrestling on the road and around the world.

In light of all the deaths in professional wrestling, there’s more than a few that have hit me hard. Chris Candido was one that really hit me hard personally. There are so many of “the boys” that have died way too young, most being under fifty, but many guys in their late twenties and early thirties. I personally have known about ninety-five percent of the guys who have passed. And, I might add that I have worked with in the ring about eighty percent. It’s safe for me to say, that if that number were only ten percent it would still be too high. I hate that pro wrestling gets such a bum rap about guys that die young, but the truth is this is a reality in today’s world of pro wrestling. Death waits for no man, wrestler or not, and his calls are usually swift and frequent.

I personally had a difficult time dealing with the passing of wrestler Chris Candido. I was involved in Chris’s first program when he first arrived in Smoky Mountain Wrestling. We had a great run together back in 1993. I would like to pay my respects and contribute a positive message about him, with a story or two of course, before moving on and mentioning all the other departed greats that I had the opportunity to meet during my career.

When Chris entered SMW he was so young, hell he was too young to die. When he started in SMW, he brought his girlfriend, Tammy with him. They were both so innocent back in those days. Chris was a class act. We

all have demons that get to us. It's hard being on the road and away from loved ones. I am by no means defending him and his actions or those we take when in the face of our demons, but I want everyone to remember a person who loved the wrestling business more than life itself. When you love this business like I do and the way in which Chris did, and I could name countless others, you will do whatever it takes to deliver to the fans. There's no complaining from me when I have to be gone on the road, working through pain and injuries to satisfy the fans. I'm sure Chris, even at his worst moments, never ever wanted to let one fan down.

When he came to SMW, we both were doing crazy stuff in the ring. He and I had both toured Japan several times, and to this day he was the only man I ever let power bomb me from the top rope. It was insane to take that big of a bump for four, yes four, nights in a row during our Thanksgiving Thunder tour in 1993. The place thought I was dead each night. Hell, I thought I was dead.

"You wanna do what?" I asked dumbfounded.

"I want to power bomb you off the top rope. Bobby, I saw this tape from Japan, and I swear we could totally do this. It's just a power bomb, only it's from the top."

"Yea, I heard ya. And I thought that's what ya said. And my question to you is, are you crazy? I hate power bombs, regular or otherwise. And you want to do one from the top rope?"

"Listen, you know I'll take care of you. We just go up top. You can even put me up there as a cut off spot, and then climb up, I'll give you a quick gut shot, and then as you double over I'll power bomb you. You'll land right in the middle of the ring. I swear."

"Chris, listen man, I totally trust ya, but this is crazy. I might land in the middle, but will I land flat? Do you think that you can rotate me over enough to lay me out flat?"

We both looked at each other knowingly. "This is fuckin' insane," I thought to myself. It was a crazy spot to try, but we both knew that there

was no way we were going to do anything other than go into that ring and try it.

There was just something about Chris and the chemistry we had, both in the ring and out of it. I slowly bent over and said, “Here, get me up.” He was every bit as strong as he looked. He lifted me up and I crunched my body at the peak and I was crotch first in his face as I heard him trying to mumble something. I slipped off his shoulders and told him that as crazy as it sounds let’s throw it in there towards the end of the match.

“And after you hit, just lay there like you’re dead.”

“Fuck, are you kidding? I might fuckin’ be dead!”

“No, listen, after the bump I’ll still be selling too. But, when I jump off the top rope, you jump up and drop kick me as I come down.”

Shaking my head in agreement, I thought to myself, “This fucker really has thought this shit out.”

The first night we did this was in Hazard, Kentucky. The move was a huge bump and came as a complete surprise to the fans. They even popped when I jumped back up and gave Chris the mid-air drop kick. It got over, as we expected, but, after our match we were approached by Kevin Sullivan and he added more than a few words of wisdom that would help the move get over even bigger the next three nights.

Even after the first night of doing this daring move, Kevin Sullivan, who was in SMW at the time came to the back to speak with both of us and said, “What are you gonna do next, cut his head off with a machete?” Being a veteran we both listened to what Kevin had to say. He added a few more comments, that all made sense to us, with the main piece of advice being that, “After you take that big move like that Bobby, you should be dead. If you have plans on doing it again, Bobby, don’t get up, just lay there, and Chris you just come down from the top rope and look around at the fans, and very sincerely look around as if you really hurt him. Bobby, don’t move, and when Chris goes to pick you up you’re just dead weight to him.

Chris, really look surprised and scared. That will make the move and spot sell better." It did too.

Even though the first one was over with, I still have three more nights of taking this move, and each night as I just lay there, Kevin was right; the fans were suspended in that moment of disbelief. What was really funny though as soon as Kevin had explained this to us, and in a very serious tone, "Now if you'll excuse me I have to go have an 'Asian Spike Match' with Brian Lee." Chris and I just busted out laughing as soon as he began walking away.

It wasn't that we didn't take him seriously, because as said, we did. But after asking us if our next move was going to be using a machete, he said that he was on his way to the ring to use a railroad spike on a guy's head and body in order to beat his opponent. Kind of ironic, or maybe comical, don't you think? In one instant he was talking about believability and in the next he was talking about spiking a guy to death in a pro wrestling match.

In the ring that night in Hazard, Kentucky, and for the next three nights on the "Thanksgiving Thunder Tour," we tore the house down with the biggest crowd pop and the biggest, riskiest bump in my career. But, it got over, and it worked. It worked even better without me delivering the mid-air drop kick and just lying there selling as Kevin had suggested. Chris was a man of his word. He did take care of me each night as he said he would. It was a hard bump to take, but I took it. And you know what? I'd never take that bump again after those four nights, but if Chris was still here with us, I'd gladly get into the ring with him and take that "crazy ass power bomb off the top rope."

I loved selling for him as we both fought for the U.S. Jr. Heavyweight title over several months. We loved the fact that Cornette told us that some of the guys were complaining about the stuff we were doing in the ring and Jimmy basically told us, "We are old school, but if they can't keep up, keep doing it anyway." This is by no means disrespect to any of my fellow wrestlers in SMW. We each had so much respect for them as well as anyone that came into SMW, but Chris and I ate this up and tried and succeeded in

doing even more high-risk crazy matches. We just had so much fun trying to outdo each other each night.

Bobby headlocks Candido while Tammy looks on from ringside

During a dinner at his apartment with his wife Tammy, they were the first people in SMW that I told I had just gotten married. Many nights that we shared a hotel room, he would stay up on the phone to Tammy, if she wasn't booked, and afterward we would stay up even longer talking about our business. We shared stories about "the boys," and about who we thought was over and what we thought would work and how much we loved this business. We had talked about our favorite wrestlers as young boys, and now as men who were in the business. We spoke about our influences and how we loved being in SMW.

Even after he had signed with WWF he came back and fulfilled an indie date in my hometown and put me over, just out of respect for me, our business and our fans. Shortly after he left for the WWF and SMW was getting close to shutting down, I was backstage at a WWF event and the first person to run over and give me a hug was Tammy. I have had many compliments throughout my career but one of the best that I remember was that night when Chris said to me in front of several of the boys, "Bobby Blaze, one of my all time favorite opponents," as he approached me backstage. I was happy to hear he was doing so well in his NWA/TNA bookings. I knew he was getting back that love and passion he had shared with me so many years ago.

I miss Chris and I miss being in the ring with him and having Mark Curtis as our referee. I'm sure those two along with many others like the "Great Malenko" are up there laughing their asses off as I still do my Hindu squats each day in preparation for a match.

Every time I think about the money I made on overseas tours, or in WCW, it doesn't mean one thing to me. My happiest memories are of the days when Chris and I were just making enough to stay alive and get to the next town to make our bookings. I'm sure on the national scene many more top name performers and many fans will miss Chris from his days in the bigger spotlight, but I will always remember him, when he was innocent and performing only as he could. He was a great worker and will always have my respect for his contributions to our industry and business. He was an innovator, a hard worker, and a true wrestling great in my eyes.

just passing through

Any true wrestling fan can probably tell you the names of just about every professional who has died in the last few years. Due to the information highway anyone else that doesn't even follow pro wrestling on a regular basis can probably tell you quite a few of the wrestlers who have passed away in recent years. Sadly, I have personally known and even worked with many of these men. I don't want to list every one of the guys who have died way too young and way too soon here. Anyone can look them up on the Internet. I really don't want to leave anyone out or off of the list, but I will only name a few of the ones that I actually knew well and share a story or two about some of them.

Some of the stories will be no more than a statement or two and some may be a little longer depending on how well I knew these men, and a few ladies, of wrestling. For example, when it comes to the ladies, I met Miss Elizabeth while we worked together in WCW. She was always rather quiet and seemed to be a nice lady. Luna Vachon was always nice to me from the first time I met her in Florida until many years later when I again ran into her in Florida, where she remembered me and was again just as nice.

The one lady that was special to me that I met and hung out with several times was "Scary" Sherry Martel. She came into SMW and worked several shows, and when she did, it seems we always ended up sharing a car ride. Sherry, her friend Kathie, along with a few others made the rides fun and interesting to say the least. Sherry nicknamed me "Baby Blazer." She was funny as can be.

I was voted "worst diver" in the territory at this point. I was only doing 70 somewhere down in Tennessee when she, Tracy Smothers, and Kathie, a friend of Sherry's who is still a friend to me today made this unanimous vote during those road trips.

We were driving one day when Sherry starts telling me to slow down. I'm doing seventy to get to the next town and Sherry keeps telling me to slow down and I look over and I have old people, I'm talking "blue haired" old ladies passing me out on I-75. I'm laughing and telling her that I'm

doing the speed limit and I try to not laugh as she keeps on my ass the entire way about how fast I drive. Then about two hours into the trip she reaches over from the back seat behind me and starts honking the horn for no reason.

“What the hell are you doing? There’s no one even around us.”

She just started laughing out loud and says, “Well cows need love too.” There was nothing around us except beautiful scenery and, well, cows. Pasture after pasture of cows. To this day if I’m driving and I see a bunch of cows out in a field I think about how funny that was. I think how out of nowhere, Sherry had to honk at those cows for some reason that day. I just smile as I recall it as I honk and think about what a good person she was to me.

I know the story about Sherry seems so simple, and it really is, but I started there to let you know, I’m not going to be dishing out any dirt on any one of my fellow brothers and sisters who have moved on. The stories that I will share are without judgment and will be only of the good memories that I have. I tend to try to remember the person for how they were to me and how they were around me. I pass no judgment on others in my everyday life, as I find that this gives me comfort, as it’s not my place to judge anyone else, as I don’t liked to be judged myself. Why should I judge anyone? I may question why a person has done or said something, and I’m good with that as a rule, but even if I don’t like their answer or the decisions that they may have made, it’s still not for me to judge.

So on with a few more names that have passed. Enjoy a story or two about some who were my friends in the wrestling business. I will be using ring or stage names as this is how you, the fan, will know them and even though I knew many of their real names, I just would like to remember them by their ring name as well.

Referee Mark Curtis. I mentioned him earlier from the first time we met in SMW. The night I had my tryout match in WCW, Mark had already been there for several months. When I found him after my match to tell him that I had been offered a contract, he shook my hand and said, “That’s great! You deserve it.”

I had my tryout match with Louie Spicolli, whom I had met while back in SMW and he passed away shortly thereafter while in WCW. “Gentleman” Chris Adams was also having a tryout match that same night in Charlotte, North Carolina. Chris had been a big star in World Class Wrestling, and was viewed as a good champion, but here he was trying out as well. Chris and I eventually had several good solid matches for TV and on a few house shows. He was always a complete professional when he worked with me. We even shared a room together a few nights down in Texas. Driving from Dallas to one town or another one day, he said that he had been running a training school and was glad to be back in the ring on a regular basis once again. I asked him if he ever trained anyone that I may have heard of, before I really thought about what I had just asked him.

“You ever hear of a guy named ‘Stone Cold’ Steve Austin?”

I looked over and just started laughing as he gave me a blank stare like I was an idiot, which I was, because I knew that he had trained him. Besides, at this point, ‘Stone Cold’ was probably the biggest star in the world at that time.

“Yes, I know you trained him Chris, and you did one hell of a job,” I thought to myself.

Here are a few more top names that I had the opportunity to meet personally and either worked with, traveled with, or just hung out with during several TV tapings that I appeared on: Kerry Von Erich, Chris Kanyon, “Battle Cat” Brady Boone, “The Renegade” Jeff Wilson, “Ravishing” Rick Rude, Owen Hart, Davey Boy Smith, Ted Petty, Johnny Grunge, “Big Boss Man” Ray Traylor, Bobby Duncam Jr., and Curt Henning. These were just some of the guys who were always cool to be around and, of course, I actually worked with them as well while they were still with us.

“Jumping” Joey Maggs became a friend of mine from the first time that I met him when he drove in to watch an SMW show and to just hang out for the weekend. Joey and I met up again while we were both in WCW, and eventually hung out quite a bit when I lived in Baltimore. Joey was just a good hearted person to me and I knew I was always welcome over at his

house. One Sunday afternoon, I surprised everyone, especially my grandmother, when he showed up for dinner after we had watched a Ravens game. I miss Joey, but I do try to only think about the good times that we had together and not concern myself with some of the crazy things we got into, and that's all I'll say about that.

I had the pleasure of meeting and working with many great ones during my career. There's so many that this list could go on forever. I actually find that it's hard to write about the guys that I have met who are now deceased.

Mike Awesome and "Road Warrior" Hawk sadly left all too soon. I wish I had a lot more to add about each, but I only was around each man on a professional level. Needless to say, I was most impressed with both men.

There are many more, actually too many more, and I will add their names after a couple of other personal stories of some of the guys that I actually had good matches with and know a good story or two about. There's also, sadly, been a bunch of independent wrestlers that I crossed paths with and a couple others that I didn't know who worked on small indie shows in towns and small gyms or buildings that I'm not listing, not out of forgetting them, but because I want their families and friends to remember them for chasing that dream, and even though they never made the big time, they no doubt busted their butts as well. I just don't feel I have enough information on some of these guys, but there is one exception to this and that is a guy who was from my hometown who was a close personal friend of mine. I hope you enjoy this story as much as I did in being blessed to know him. Many may have never heard of him, but he was well known around Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia. Here's to you Carl.

why wrestlers wear masks

"Ladies and gentleman, from Parts Unknown, and weight unknown…!"

You've all heard it a thousand times, the ring announcer introducing the two combatants for the next match and you hear those words, "parts

unknown, and weight unknown." So you're going to tell me that this wrestler who was just in the back and is now coming out to the ring is so mean and so tough that in addition to not knowing where he's from, he's so damned mean you can't even get him to get on the scale during the weigh-ins prior to the match?

The mysterious wrestler approaches the ring sporting a mask. Or as they call it in the business, "a hood." He is from "Parts, Unknown." Now everyone knows that Parts, Unknown is right below Tupelo, Mississippi. (Tupelo is right below One Below, Mississippi.) As he makes his way to the ring and we witness the black, white, colorful, fancy, ugly, plain or even exotic mask, we still don't know his weight. Sometimes, especially back in the older days, this masked man was a huge burly guy who looked as if he could not only scare kids in this mask on Halloween, he was so big and strong looking, he could clear out the bar in a barroom brawl with his massive size and nasty disposition. In the early days of pro wrestling, most masked wrestlers were heels. Nowadays many masked wrestlers, wrestlers who wear a hood, work as baby faces. They are also built different nowadays, coming in all shapes and sizes, rather than just some big guy under as mask. It's also important to point out the mask that a wrestler wears has different meanings in different cultures. The masked man is sometimes used as just a gimmick on a wrestling show, or it, the mask, may be a character and that character is his gimmick.

I also found out they do get laid, contrary to Malenko telling me otherwise. They Do! Damn! I wish I could remember that chick's name. Oh well, it doesn't matter, she probably doesn't remember mine either. I just wish I knew this guy's unknown weight.

I bought my first pair of wrestling boots and trunks from a guy named Carl Lundsford. Carl was a really super nice guy who couldn't wrestle worth a lick. He was glad to tell you he couldn't wrestle, but he could work. One night on a small independent show I was sitting in the baby face locker room talking to my brother, "The Scorpion," when about a half hour before the show, in walks Carl.

"Those guys over there (referring to the heel locker room) are all talking about how tough they are and how they just beat this guy and that

guy and they all hated to ‘lose’ to the baby faces.”

If you got to know Carl like my brother and I did, you would just crack up laughing like we did. He said, “Those guys must think this is real. I just got up and said, ‘I must be in the wrong locker room. I was looking for the actor’s locker room. You guys are too tough for me.’” See, Carl was proud to be a professional wrestler, but he didn’t actually wrestle, because he didn’t have to. He knew how to entertain. He was far more talented at giving the fans more than their money’s worth with his gimmick.

Way before I met Malenko who gave me the Bobby “Blaze” gimmick and “The best gimmick in wrestling kid, is to be able to wrestle,” I had met Carl. Before I had my first match, Carl was already selling me my first pair of boots. “I’ll even throw in the trunks free. They already have your initials on them, BS.”

After a couple of phone calls and finally meeting with Carl, I asked, “So you’re telling me that for $150.00 for those boots, you’re going to give me a couple pair of trunks and one of them has my initials on them?” Well I knew after checking around that a pair of new wrestling boots cost at least two-hundred and fifty dollars. Although these boots had been worn and were a “used” pair, they still looked as if they were brand new. In fact they looked as if they had only been worn in a match or two. I also knew that new trunks cost around forty dollars per pair, and that was for a plain pair, let alone a pair that already had my initials on them.

“Can I see the trunks when I come down today?” Yeah was all Carl said as I hung up the phone, realizing that I was one step closer to being inside of an actual wrestling ring. While visiting Carl down at his locally owned business, I learned about only one of the many reasons wrestlers wear masks. There are many reasons why some wrestlers wear masks, but for the purpose of this story I’m only giving you one reason, and to me, it’s a good one.

The boots that I looked at and wanted so desperately were white leather and, as I said, looked brand spanking new to me. There was also a pair of blue trunks that had three white stars on the rear end that I really liked because they were a dark shade of blue, and blue just so happened to

be my favorite color. The other pair was more like a sky blue. What really caught my eye about this pair were the two big black letters that read, “BS!” There it was, my initials on a pair of professional wrestling trunks! Bobby Smedley from Ashland, Kentucky, was going to be a professional wrestler. All by the power invested, well okay, the money invested by me, in a pair of boots that also came with two pair of wrestling trunks, I was on my way to start living my dream as a professional wrestler.

“Hey Carl, how come you got a pair of tights with BS on them anyway?”

“Well, funny you should ask Bobby. Ya see, I was wrestling in a match up in West Virginia one night when I first started wrestling. I got to the ring, and I was a nervous wreck, but I was pretty excited too. I got up in the ring and the ring announcer said, ‘Ladies and Gentlemen, from Detroit, Michigan, Billy Savage.’ About that time, this little old lady in the front row stood up and screamed, ‘That’s a damn lie! I just bought a vacuum cleaner from that man over in Ashland on Tuesday!’ Man you talk about embarrassment, I couldn’t even wrestle. My opponent had to get me through the entire match. After that night, I swore I’d never wrestle as Billy Savage again. Since then I’ve always worn a mask whenever I wrestled.”

The trunks had BS on them because, “Billy Savage” from Detroit, Michigan, had failed in the ring as a disgraced and embarrassed man on that night. But, also on that night a far better wrestler and more powerful character than Billy Savage was born. “The Dark Shadow!”

One sunny Sunday afternoon, my brother and I ran into Carl and his lovely wife Janet at a local flea market, when jokingly my brother said, “The Dark Shadow. I didn’t even recognize you without your mask.” In a slow, low voice Carl replied, “That’s the way it’s supposed to be.” He was dead pan serious when he said it. Again, my brother and I just started dying laughing at how serious he was about protecting his gimmick. He was right of course, that’s the way it’s supposed to be. That’s when guys protected the business.

The mysterious masked wrestler who no one would ever know outside the ring without his mask on. Carl was a very successful and skilled

vacuum cleaner salesman and repair man who had a prominent business in Ashland. I have a lot of respect for Carl and for his honesty about not actually being a wrestler. He was a worker, and man could he work a crowd. He had ideas and thoughts in his head and in his body language that more than compensated and replaced what he couldn't do in the ring. That's another thing about being a masked wrestler. You have to change your body language, use hand gestures, overextend or exaggerate some of the movements in the ring. The masked wrestler really can't change his facial expressions under 'a hood.' To me personally, I really loved working under a hood several times during my career.

Carl was one of the few guys that I did respect who couldn't wrestle, as in he didn't actually wrestle, wrestle. I respected him because he was at least honest enough about his wrestling ability, and the way he knew how to get his gimmick over as a worker in wrestling. He could and would put on a show like very few others could in the ring. He was a performer. On the night Billy Savage's career died, THE DARK SHADOW'S career was born. Carl's character, The Dark Shadow got over well, and he had a long and fun career over the years. I always enjoyed stopping by his shop and hanging out with him or seeing him at a local show. So now I know who that masked man was, and I know he was from Ashland, but ya know what? I never did know how much he weighed. "Dark Shadow, weight unknown!" Thanks Carl for the many matches and memories, but more importantly, thanks for your friendship.

so many more

But wait, there's more! Sadly!

I first saw Bam Bam Bigalow in a *Sports Illustrated* issue that had his and Larry Sharpe's pictures in it, taken at The Monster Factory. I met him in Pittsburgh and he was always really good to me when we were on the road. I actually traveled up to The Monster Factory before eventually deciding to attend Malenko's instead.

Another Bam Bam was Terry Gordy. I always liked Gordy's in-ring style. Who can ever forget watching him in all those great "Freebird"

matches, and all the feuds they had in every territory they ever worked? I also loved watching him work and his style from watching all the Japanese tapes I could get my hands on when I lived in Florida. I mention this because he could flat out work his ass off in the ring.

One night in SMW I was in a tag match that put me and Robert Gibson against Tommy Rich and Terry Gordy. The finish was going to be a back drop from Rich with Gordy catching me in mid-air and turning it into a power bomb. Visions of him stuffing my head up my ass were vivid as I recalled him just destroying some of the Japanese guys that I had seen on tape.

I was a big fan of Terry's and Robert and Tommy knew this, so when Gordy arrived at the building, unbeknownst to me, they were already in his ear about me. I, of course introduced myself to him and he was professional as we shook hands, but I sensed a little something else in his voice as we spoke. I told him I was a huge fan of his and had a lot of respect for him. It seemed like he didn't need any more fans, especially one of the boys. I had already worked a match in which I went over and turned around and had another match with Tommy before Robert and I were scheduled for the third hour of TV tapings that would pit the two of us against Tommy and Terry.

Once in the ring and doing a spot with Tommy, I tagged Hoot and Rich tagged Gordy. They didn't even do a spot before Robert tags me back in to face Gordy. Now the entire time before the match took place, Tommy and Robert kept telling me how "stiff" Gordy was and he didn't like "selling" to someone smaller than him. I was scared shitless as this was Terry Fucking Gordy I was about to step through the ropes with. As soon as we locked up, he says, "Arm drag." I just stood there with his arm held out in an arm bar. He was selling it like I was ripping it off. "Arm drag!" Oh I heard him, but I just couldn't do it. I was awestruck to be in the ring with him, and immediately tagged Robert back in. I could see all three of them smiling as I stood on the side of the apron knowing that I had been set up. Once I got back in it was a pleasure to be in the ring with such professionals as him and Rich. Tommy ended up back dropping me and Gordy caught me and laid me flat in the middle of the ring. He put me down as easy as I had gone

up for the power bomb. He said, “Thanks brother,” as he pinned me for the three-count. Once we got in the back Rich and Gibson were laughing their asses off at me because they had ribbed me so hard as to how Gordy was going to kill me. I’m glad to this day that it was a rib.

I went to Terry and thanked him for the match. He was super cool to me as he asked me how come I didn’t arm drag him like he said. I said that I had heard him call the spot but I just couldn’t do it. I told him that I didn’t know what to expect once the match started but I was prepared for the worst. I also told him on this night how I had so much respect for him, and the way he worked. He was very professional and we had more than a few good laughs together while he was in SMW.

There are so many guys that I could name that have passed away way too soon. Another great name that comes to mind is, “The Junk Yard Dog.” I met JYD while on tour over in Australia, then worked a bunch of independent shows with him before he passed away. He came to the local YMCA where my mom was working one day when he was back in WCW. I was out of town working for SMW at the time. Anyway, JYD came into the Y and asked if he could work out and of course Mom said yes, but he would need an ID to get in. He said that he left his wallet in the car and would be right back in.

“That’s okay Sylvester, I know who you are,” Mom said.

She told me that JYD did a quick turn and asked her how she knew his real name. “You’re Sylvester Ritter, The Junk Yard Dog,” my mom said. He was acting all confused as he walked back to the counter to talk with my mom. JYD couldn’t believe someone knew his real name. She told him that I was her son, and that she had looked over the itinerary with me from the Australian Tour. They both had a good laugh, and she let him in free to go work out. He also told me this story later on when I saw him at one of Bobby Fulton’s Big Time Wrestling shows. We both had a good laugh.

I guess I could go on and on about the guys that have passed through, but as said, I feel compelled to make mention of the ones that I actually met or worked with during my career. Here’s just a few others: Nelson Royal

was a pleasure to meet while I was in SMW. I met him several times and he was always a gentleman

A couple of real ring veterans that I met were Chief Wahoo McDaniel and Dick Murdock. McDaniel and I wrestled together on a couple of county fair shows up in West Virginia towards the end of his career. He was a true legend. It's sad that many of today's pro wrestling fans never got to see him in his prime.

Murdock was funny as heck when he showed up to work in SMW for Cornette. I called his room one night to get his opinion on whether or not I should go to Puerto Rico. "That place owes me money! I'm Dick Murdock and if I can't get my money there do you really think you will get yours?" That was all I needed to hear as I had heard that the office there was behind on payoffs, so I never went. Whether or not they owed him money I don't know, but I was glad I took his advice because shortly thereafter I heard that several of the guys that I was going to do the tour with were way behind in getting paid.

One of the best matches that I have ever seen in person was between Dick Murdock and "Bullet" Bob Armstrong in Paintsville, Kentucky. From the bleachers in a high school I watched Captain Redneck Dick Murdock run across the wrestling ring and give Bullet Bob Armstrong a flying head scissors, taking him down in one fluid motion. Nothing looked funny or out of place as the guy with pale white skin and a beer gut took the tanned and very well toned and conditioned Bullet to the mat before looking up into the stands and yelling out, "The billboard still says wrestling!" The thing that did look out of place was The Rock-n-Roll Express, Tracy Smothers, and myself sitting mesmerized, witnessing the mat action and the well executed professional wrestling match that was taking place.

The only thing that looked even more odd was when I looked over to see the heel wrestlers from the other locker room sitting up at the opposite side in the bleachers watching and enjoying the match just as well. Murdock and Armstrong put on a wrestling clinic for about thirty minutes, if not for the fans, maybe to just entertain 'the boys' watching, but more importantly, well, because they could.

It’s not my intention to leave any of the professional wrestlers that have passed away off this list. As I said, you can refer to the internet if you don’t already know of the ones that have passed away. I will just mention a couple more of ‘the boys’ that have passed away.

Brian “Crush” Adams was good to me by helping me get a couple of shots on the “Thursday Night Thunder” tapings to help increase my bookings. We had worked a show in Orlando when he first joined the New World Order. We had a really good match that he was very pleased with, and it was his idea to have a match on live television with me to help him get over. One thing that Brian did before we worked together was he asked Dean Malenko about me and my work. Brian told me that Dean said that I would be a good choice to get him over and I was glad that he chose me to do so.

There were several times when I was in WCW that one of the guys would ask either Dean, Chris, or Eddie about my work before they worked with me. I knew my job there was to “enhance talent,” and the guys that already knew how to work always wanted someone who also knew how to work and knew that their job was to help them do so. I wish the same could be said for some of the guys from the Power Plant, because they were just too green to realize that some of the talent in WCW, like The Armstrong Brothers, Barry Horowitz, a couple of others, and myself, were there to help them and to “enhance” their talents, not control them or take their spots.

The exception to this were guys like Ray “Glacier” Lloyd and Billy Kidman. They both knew how to work and had a deep respect for the wrestling business and the veterans that were there to help them get over.

Intense was the best way to describe Randy “Macho Man” Savage. I had met him as a fan when his family, ran the old International Championship Wrestling when they were based out of Lexington, Kentucky. Those ICW shows were packed with talent back in the days when territories were still around and thriving, although I’m not sure that ICW was thriving. I did know back then that Savage was destined for stardom on a grander scale one day. Of course he did become a huge star in the wrestling industry. ICW could put on one heck of a show for the fans when they came to our local towns on a monthly basis.

One of the funniest things that happened between Savage and myself was when we both about did a double knockout while I was exiting and he was entering a slippery restroom floor one night on a show. As I pulled the door to open it, he was pushing it from the other side and we slid right into each other. We both just had a good laugh as we avoided taking a bump on the piss wet floor. “Oh yeah, The Macho Man and Bobby Blaze about to do a double knockout right on the bathroom floor. Thank you brother,” was all he said as I warned him about one of the urinals overflowing.

Another great wrestler who worked in ICW back in the day was “Pistol” Pez Whatley. I always enjoyed seeing Pez when I was around him in WCW. He was a great amateur wrestler who wrestled at the college level and played football for the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

He was a legit guy in the ring as well as out of it. He used to tell me about how when he used to work in the old ICW, every night was like a shoot as they had so many good actual wrestlers on the card. He said that whenever he worked with the likes of Bob Orton, Jr. or Ronnie Garvin night in and night out they just went at it, move after move with holds and counter holds, and just wrestled as if it were a shoot until it was time to really start working their match for whatever angle they were working or whatever finish they were doing. He said it was great to work with such talented men who knew what they were doing. He even talked about the nights that he had worked with my trainer, Malenko, and how talented and easy he was to work with even though they would work hard and stiff with each other until it was time to start “putting on a show” for the fans.

I really liked Pez a lot. I had much respect for him as a wrestler and as a person. I liked when he used the “Willie B. Hurt” gimmick in the old Continental Wrestling as well as his gimmick, “Shaska” in the NWA. To me, he was such a nice man that I had the pleasure to meet. We talked at catering often as he reflected on some of his career and shared some of the above stories with me.

One night, in the catering area he really surprised me when he came over to sit down to eat with me and another wrestler. “Bobby, I thought of you the other day,” he said out of nowhere. I was a little taken aback as I really didn’t know why he would be thinking about me. “The other night I

was driving from Cincinnati on my way to Charleston, West Virginia, and I saw a sign that said Ashland, Kentucky, one mile." I told him I knew exactly where he was talking about on 52 East, right before you get to the Ashland bridges. "Yeah, I thought about ya. Little ol' Ashland, Kentucky, home of Bobby Blaze. Man, we used to draw some good houses there back when I was with ICW." Sometimes it's the simple things that someone says that make another person feel good about themselves. On this evening, Pez made me feel good, that someone that I had so much respect for saw a road sign and thought of me as he reflected back on the earlier days of his wrestling career. I thanked him, and told him, "I sure do remember you and that entire ICW crew. Those shows were some of the best live shows I had ever seen as a kid Pez. Thanks, man, that means a lot." I never will forget that, just like I will never forget you, "Pistol" Pez Whatley.

Eddie Guerrero was probably the "lightest," in terms of wrestling and working with of any of the guys that I had ever worked. His talent was unreal. He understood the way matches should go. He had great timing and ability. I was of course sad to hear about his passing because I truly felt a connection to him. I think Eddie touched a lot of lives. There are a lot of the boys who are better off just for having had the chance to be around Eddie. I had admired how hard he worked for his spot in WCW. I think his charisma as a person was another reason to admire him. He was down to earth and a good person to be around when I was around him. He was always very positive and willing to listen to what was going on in your life, as a person, and not just a wrestler. He would take the time to say a prayer for others and was just a real grounded person to be around. He was a huge talent and of course his hard work eventually paid off when the WWE put the title on him, and rightfully so.

I would say, and still say to anyone, about this next person, like the rest of you, I was in total shock and disbelief when I first heard about the Chris Benoit tragedy. Let it be known that I judge no man for his actions. I may question why someone would or would not do certain things in their life, but those actions are not for me to judge. When I think of Chris, I only try to think of him as the man I first met while we toured Australia together back in 1993. He worked hard to become the man he became in the wrestling business. He may have worked harder and longer than anyone to

get the top spot that he eventually earned. Chris to me was a complete professional in every sense of the word when it came to the wrestling business. He was a no nonsense hard working, hardnosed, tough son of a gun.

Some of the things that come to mind about my dealings with Chris are from the first time that I met him until I worked my last match in WCW, which was against Chris. That covers a lot of ground, and many years. The first time I talked with him we were behind the curtain on the first night of the Australian tour. I was working with my old partner Rico and Chris had worked a match with Jushin Thunder Liger.

We were watching the next couple of matches when he spoke to me. He made some smirking remark that I sensed had some humor behind it. We talked about our respective matches before he asked me about why I wasn't trying out for WCW. He said with my style that I might get over there.

"Oh, I don't know. If I went there they'd probably just have me jobbing every night."

I can still hear him now. "You too good to do a job?"

"Oh no, that's not the way I meant it. I just put Rico over tonight. I don't have a problem putting anyone over or doing a job. It's just that I have been talking to Cornette down in Smoky Mountain Wrestling and I think with my size and style I'd have a better place in his company than in WCW."

Chris just grinned, with a missing tooth, looking like the tough little badass he was as I realized that he had got me. "I'm just messing with you. I didn't know that you were talking to Cornette. I'm just saying your work is good enough to get into WCW." I thought that was a huge compliment coming from someone who I had only just met. I knew who he was as I had seen a lot of his work from his early days in Calgary, as well as some of his most recent work that I had watched on some Japanese tapes while I had been in Tampa.

After that first conversation I realized that Chris was just a great guy as he invited me to work out with him the next day. There were some amazingly talented guys on the tour. Every night Chris was either having five star matches with Liger, or teaming with Liger in tag matches against The Malenko Brothers. Every night he worked, he was tearing the house down with outstanding performances. After that tour ended I didn't see Chris again for several years until we were both in WCW.

I had two really good matches for the WCW television tapings while I was there with Chris. One, as I said was the last match I that worked while I was under contract there. The other took place in Toledo, Ohio. Chris approached me and said to come with him. We were scheduled to be the twenty-third match on the card which was the semi-main event that night. It was probably one of my top five matches of all-time. He was as intense as ever before we even stepped in the ring that night and was more intense once we entered the ring. Unbeknownst to me, I was actually scheduled to work with someone else there who didn't think that I was a good fit for him. Hearing this, I later found out that Chris had stepped up and said that he would take the match with me. Scott Armstrong came up to me and told me what had happened and then he said that he spoke to Chris about my work and Chris said that he was aware of me and my talent and to watch the match and enjoy. I was glad to hear that Scott had spoken to him. I was glad that I found out the truth to the reason for Chris wanting to have such a good match with me. Even a year later Norman Smiley walked up to me in that same building and said, "Hey Bobby, this is where you and Benoit had that good match." "You remember that?" I asked, amazed that he remembered. "I always remember the best matches I've seen and that was a good one." I was and still am proud of that match. I will always remember Chris for being polite, intense, and professional towards me. I think of him as I knew him, not for anything else.

Sadly, even more of my friends and wrestling brothers have passed on since I first began writing this memoir, including a good friend of mine, who also happened to be from Ashland, Kentucky, by the name of William T. Smith. Bill had become a professional wrestling referee and I helped train him along the way. He eventually ended up traveling with me through the years, using the name Sandy McGee, "The Blind Referee." I had known

Bill most of my life as he used to go to all the wrestling shows back in the day down at our National Guard Armory. Bill wore the thickest “Coke bottle” glasses you can imagine, thus the blind ref gimmick I put on him.

Bill was a great guy and a good travel companion for many years, just never ask him to steer the car while you check the map out. This was before GPS of course, not that I would ever use one anyway, but he damn near killed us on several occasions when I asked him to, “Take the wheel,” and he would just swerve into another lane or towards the median. Oh, did I mention, he never had a driver’s license? Anyway, sadly, I have to add Bill to my list of guys that were just passing through. He was a good ref and he took every match very seriously. I was glad that he had been a part of my life.

I also miss him, as he was my buddy who I always played the Kentucky Lottery with. We would buy our tickets before leaving for a town, and many nights we would return later in the evening or after a couple of days only to find out that we had won the Pick 3. Bill had a “system” as he put it to predict winning numbers on a regular basis.

I loved pulling “ribs” on and with Bill. Once while traveling back from a show in Cleveland, we stopped at an all night gas station that sold chocolate donuts, and man, did that guy love his chocolate donuts. I pulled in and bought a Coke needing some caffeine to stay awake, then I headed back out to my car. As he is still going through the line, a black guy and a white guy were sitting outside the store, drunk as hell. The black guy asked for a dollar and I asked him if he was gonna buy a beer. He said, “Hell no, I got plenty of beer right over there, I’m going in to get me a sandwich before this place closes.” I laughed at him and actually appreciated his honesty. I told him that I would give him a dollar if he harassed my buddy when he came out by asking him to share his donuts. I tossed the guy a dollar and laughed as I told him to enjoy his sandwich and casually pointed to Bill as he was coming out the door holding his bag of donuts.

I hit the unlock button on my car and opened the driver’s side and started to lean in like I was gonna leave. Right as the old drunk guy started hitting Bill up for his donuts Bill quickly reached for his door handle. I hit the button to the “lock” position and left Bill standing there in a state of

panic trying to get into the car as fast as he could while the guy starts giving him a hard time about those “damned donuts.” Well, as you can imagine, I was laughing my ass off, and by this time, the drunk guy couldn’t keep a straight face either and was laughing as he walked away. It was the best buck I think I ever spent on entertainment. Once we got going down the road, I finally told him that I had told the guy to harass him. Needless to say, “The Blind Ref” didn’t find it nearly as funny as I did and didn’t speak to me again for about another thirty miles. Again, a dollar well spent. Good bye “ol’ buddy Bill,” as my boys used to call him.

Another loss that hit me hard as I was writing this memoir was that of “The Nature Boy,” Goldie Rogers. Goldie was truly a one of a kind guy. Even though he used the “nature boy” gimmick, he was still one of a kind. He also worked as “The Bowler” at one point in his career. Goldie was one of the first guys that I met when I worked in the Maritime area of Canada back in the early nineties. Goldie was well known throughout Canada as an easy and fun guy to work with in the ring.

I had my best times and memories of Goldie just traveling with him. I can still hear him saying “YES” throughout his matches. He had the habit of saying this over and over throughout a match. I learned a lot working with Goldie on a nightly basis. We did a couple of programs together and I seemed to, “smarten up” as he put it, along the way with an occasional elbow to my head, in order to help smarten me up. They were deserved and appreciated I might add. Business is business. He was such a colorful character in the ring, it didn’t take much for him to help you get over with the crowd. He had long blonde hair and a black beard. The crowd would scream, “bearded lady,” and yell, “No” in unison in response to every time he yelled, “Yes.”

I learned more from him on the many road trips we took together. He had been in the business for almost twenty years when I met him. He had so many great stories. It’s hard to believe, but Goldie had actually wrestled in Ashland way back in 1976 and I had seen him as a young kid. He told me about doing several towns around my hometown area during his rookie year that brought back so many memories of when I had been a young fan.

The other thing Goldie was known for was calling everyone, “Jack.” Anyone who knew Goldie could expect him to end about every sentence with, “Jack.” One of the funniest things that I saw and heard him do was when I first came into the territory and didn’t really know him that well. We were waiting outside the locker room area after the matches were over and waiting for our payoffs. My partner Rico and I were standing there talking to a lady from the newspaper about our first tour of Canada when this guy comes walking over towards the area a few feet away from us where Goldie was standing.

“Fuck off Jack!” was all I heard as I looked up to see Goldie standing there telling the guy not to come any closer. “I said piss off! Fuck off Jack!” The guy slowed down some but still continued to walk towards us. “Fucking marks! Fuck off Jack!” The guy was now about ten feet away when he says in a low voice, “I’ve got the hash.” Goldie went from being red in the face, and turned from being a heel to a baby face in about a nanosecond as his graveled voice leveled out to a small gruff, “Well why didn’t you say something sooner? Come on. Get over here Jack.”

It was so funny to see how his tough guy demeanor went from telling the guy to fuck off to welcoming him with open arms into one of the rest rooms beside the locker room. Yeah, Goldie was a good guy who had a heart of gold under that tough guy image. I ended up becoming friends with Goldie and he eventually moved into an apartment that we shared in Moncton when we weren’t staying in some hotel. I did two tours with Goldie and shared many good laughs with him.

One of my best memories of him was when, at the end of one of our tours we went out to eat together. He ordered a steak, “blue rare.” I had never seen him eat red meat prior to this time and he wanted a steak now that the tour was over. We just sat there talking about the business, life, traveling, and how lucky we were to be in such a great business. I’m thankful that I had the chance to meet Goldie and even more thankful that I got to know him on a personal level. Whenever I order a steak, I still think about Goldie. I think about him ordering his “blue rare” which, as I learned that night, “Just put it on the grill for about five seconds on each side and bring it to me.” So, here’s to you, Jack, RIP Goldie Rogers, “YES!”

Brad Armstrong. I can't believe I am even having to add a story about Brad and his recent passing. The world of professional wrestling was hit really hard with the passing of Brad Armstrong. I had just walked into my house when I heard the news of his sudden death and I literally went numb. I think I must have sat on my couch for several hours without even moving that day. My memories of Brad are just too many to count. Brad was one of the best people in the world that you could ever hope to meet. His personality and his smile always seemed to brighten my day anytime I was around him. I have a feeling that anyone who ever met Brad would tell you the same. He was just a great guy.

In the ring, he was one of the most talented wrestlers ever. Many will say that he never got the big push in wrestling that he deserved, but Brad's in-ring talent spoke for itself. Anyone who knew Brad and knew what a tremendous worker he was, had the deepest and utmost respect for him. His talent kept him in a job for twenty plus years in the wrestling business, push or no push, and I think that speaks volumes for the amount of talent he had and the kind of person he was.

I always like to think about the good in people and the good times I had while I was with them. Brad had a lot of good in him, and we had a lot of good times while I was around him. Some of my memories include the time that Brad, his brother Scott, and I all spent a day at The Mall of America in Minnesota. We rode several of the rides there, just like we were kids and just had ourselves a blast. It's times like these in your life that you just never forget.

Another memory I have of Brad was when we were in WCW down in Orlando shooting the World Wide tapings at Universal Studios. Usually there were about 150 guys in one big studio loaf area dressing, undressing, talking, hanging out, just doing their own thing while waiting for "the white boards" to go up. The white boards were just that, big white, dry erase boards that had who would be wrestling who on that day.

Everyone would be standing around waiting to see who and if they would be working that day. At Universal they shot five televised events per day over a ten day period, which in turn would air over the course of the

next three months. Then, everyone would return months later and do it all again.

One morning, prior to the boards going up, Paul Orndorff yelled out for everyone's attention. Now you have to realize, you're in this big studio and you have all these guys from all over the world in there. I mean you have Japanese guys in one corner, you have Mexicans in another corner, you have the Florida crew in another area, you have the guys from Minnesota in another, and of course you had the guys that didn't fit into any of these groups who formed their own groups or sat alone.

I had my own area towards the back of the studio that I shared with a group of guys known as, "Southern White Trash." It wasn't that we were trashy, we were just a bunch of Southern wrestlers who chose to sit together and decided the name and stereotype fit, so it stuck.

So anyway, Paul yells out several times for everyone's attention and to quiet down so he could speak about the day's events. As several of the boys started making their way towards where Paul was about to speak, others continued to talk and slowly make their way over to where Paul was standing and looking over some papers. He was still asking, in a professional manner for everyone to get quiet and gather round. Out of nowhere, in a loud high pitched voice comes, "Fuck you Paul!"

The placed popped! All the boys laughed and roared in the obvious reference to an incident between Paul and Big Van Vader, where Paul mopped the floor with the Monster Vader. IT WAS BRAD. As the laughter continued, the boys all were now in a big circle, when Paul just looked up and said something about, "That Damn Brad." Of course Paul was laughing as well. He, like everyone else, got the joke and laughed along with it before having to give out the day's instructions and assignments.

That moment really lightened the mood, and set the tone for the entire day as Brad's comment made everyone laugh, smile, and be more at ease about being there shooting television tapings for the next ten hours. Thanks Brad. I'm sure I could go on and on with humorous and good stories about Brad and the impact and impression he left not only on my life, but so many others as well.

Brad was a tremendous worker and one of the all time greats. He was as smooth as silk in the ring. He could work with a broom and make it look good. He could go out and have a five star match with anyone on any given night. I witnessed first-hand a five-star match he had with Ric Flair one night. They just tore the house down. You can bet, as soon as they walked through the curtain, all the boys stood and gave them a standing ovation. Timing, psychology, the moves, the art of the work, to say it was outstanding would be an understatement. But, for as good of a worker as he was, and for as smart, and as quick witted as he was, he was a better man and person than many of us will ever be. Brad Armstrong, thanks for the friendship and memories.

JT Lightning. The first time I met JT was in Detroit. I swear I think the guy weighed like a hundred and thirty five pounds. Yeah I know he was probably closer to one-sixty, but I liked that because he was a lot like me when I started wrestling. He was tall like me, but lean, like I had been back when I first started training, but the thing that most impressed me was the way he carried himself. He was very professional and polite. He walked up to me and introduced himself with the confidence of the true champion that he would later become. It's kind of like what Red said about Andy in *The Shawshank Redemption*. "I knew I liked him from the start." After that first meeting we stayed in touch via telephone and he told me that he was going to start running shows in Cleveland and asked if I was interested in coming in for him. At the time I was working in SMW and worked several indie shows on my off days.

Later, when JT lined up a three day run, I was booked. Again, JT was very professional and I knew he was serious about running shows on a regular basis. All through the years, and I mean this sincerely, I thought JT and Cleveland All Pro Wrestling ran some of the best independent pro wrestling shows in the country. JT was a good worker and had a great mind for the wrestling game. He had been my friend for almost eighteen years before he passed away.

He loved Punk Music! That's one of the special little things I'll remember about him. Still to this day, whenever I hear or listen to a Ramones song I think about JT. That, and the fact that he worked his ass

off, in the ring and out. JT was and will always be special to me. I think JT was truly happy for me when I "won" the SMW Heavyweight Title. He was “old school” in the way he loved wrestling, and SMW brought that “old school wrestling” style that JT loved. I think that’s why we got along so well. He booked me on as many shows as I did him. When SMW ran the Sunday Bloody Sunday show in which the title changed hands from Lawler to me, I think JT was the first person outside of my brother that called and congratulated me. Titles didn’t mean much to me in the wrestling business. Friendships did, and do. JT was my friend! JT was a champ for and to me for the way he “fought the good fight” and refused to give up. He was like that.

I went back to Cleveland before JT passed away, going to the show out of respect for JT, and because I sincerely wanted to see him. He had asked me to come up because he was going to have Jerry “The King” Lawler on the card. I was just going to come up to see him and to just hang out with him, but he booked me right into the main event as a “special guest referee.” That really didn’t mean too much to me, but the fact that JT wanted me to be a part of this, well that meant more to me than anyone will ever know. I did it for him and I was glad I went. I never will forget the last time that we spoke to each other. “Bobby, when I saw you walk through that door, I almost cried.” Well, I went back and I did cry, knowing my friend didn’t have long.

Writing these stories was probably the hardest part of this book for me. I know it took the longest time to get through this section as I wrote it. Writing about the death of my friend JT was the hardest one of all. I had to take the time to reflect on my own life. I had battled some of the same demons that he and many others had faced. I had to face and deal with my own personal injuries, demons, and losses during the writing of this book. I also had to face the fact that we are all on a time limit as to how much time we have here on this planet. Fact is, one day our time limit will expire too, just like it did for those warriors and wrestlers that passed away far too soon.

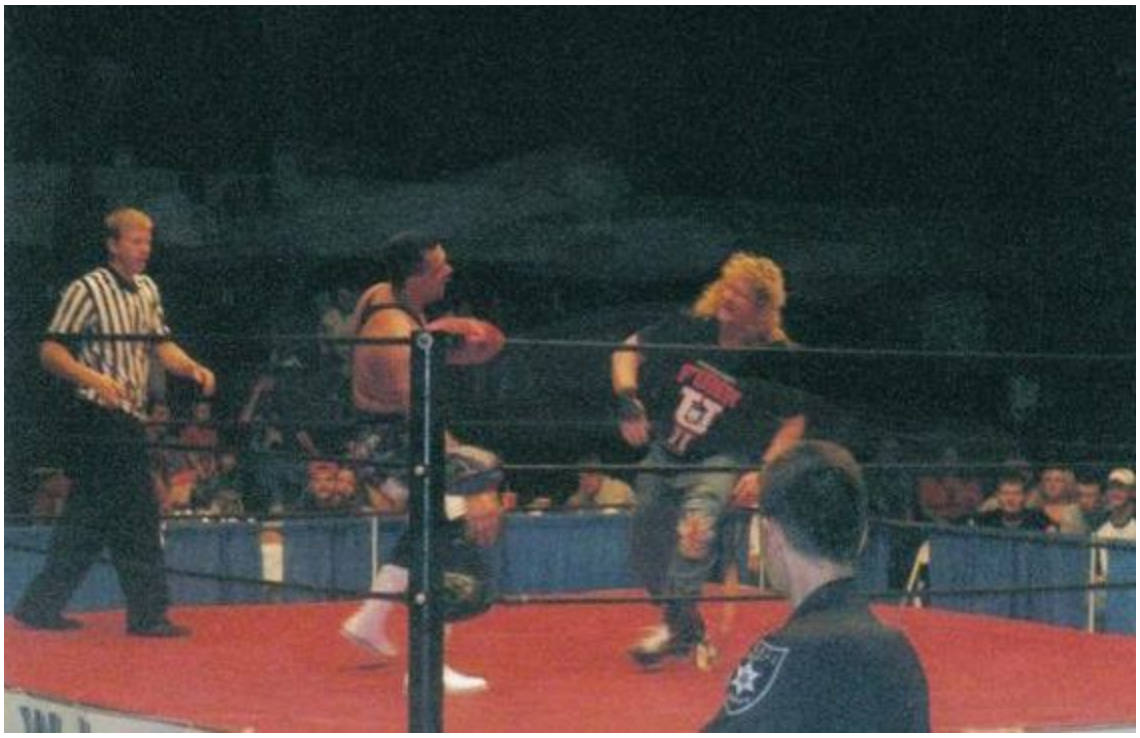
When I look at the time I spent with some of these guys and ladies, it really wasn’t long, once you put life into perspective, and realize just how

delicate life really is. JT knew the odds, but he accepted the battle and faced down cancer and took it to the middle of the ring of life and battled it until the bell tolled. A “broad way” as it’s called in the biz, going through until the time limit expired. JT didn’t tap out or quit, he took death to a time limit draw, a “broad way.” And, even though the fight of his life is over, he is still a winner and a true champ standing in the middle of the ring with his arms raised in my mind’s eye. The fans, and those who loved him, can all stand and chant, “five more minutes, five more minutes!” But, the “office” called in the finish, and there’s no five more minutes in this match. I find comfort in the fact that JT now has an eternity of “going over” in that big squared circle in the sky, ’cause champs may die, but they never surrender, and they never quit.

I can see him now, smiling, pain and cancer free, in his new home. I think if he did have the five more minutes, he probably would say something to me like, “Bobby, here’s the deal, you’re the one I got that, ‘we’ll start out, boom, boom, boom, bang, go to the finish, and take it home’ from.” I can hear him now saying, “I didn’t tap and I didn’t quit. I just took it home!”

Take it home bro! And until we meet again my friend, much love and respect! I love you!

All were just passing through!!!



JT Lightning & Bobby Blaze

twelve

What's going on in Bobby's world today?

Persevering, that's what I'm trying to do. "It's a little like wrestling a gorilla. You don't quit when you're tired. You quit when the gorilla is tired." Robert Strauss

So, what's happening in my world nowadays? Today, I wake to dreams. I have always had vivid dreams, so several times a week I wake up from a dream that has once again placed me back inside the squared circle. I'm usually getting ready for a match or at a show talking to the boys in the back right before I go out into the ring. I dream of hearing that crowd one more time, and right when the match starts, right before I wake up, I wonder what the hell am I doing here, and then the bell rings.

They are only dreams, but in reality, I am currently raising my two teenage sons. I spend as much time as I can with them as they are in high school and doing well. I go to their football games or wrestling matches, and enjoy sharing as much time as I can with each of them. My oldest son has enlisted in the US Marines and will be leaving for boot camp before too long, and he will serve his country proudly, and I am more proud of him than he will ever know. My youngest is on his high school wrestling team. He has been on the varsity for two years now and has a great chance of winning state by the time he is a senior. He excels academically and has good common sense along with a quick wit and dynamic personality that is contagious to all those he meets. Of course, I am more proud of him than he may realize, but I do know that he knows the amount of love and respect I have for him.

I spend my days reading. I've always enjoyed reading and always have a new book with me, or I'm on my Kindle Fire reading my most recent downloads. I don't watch a lot of wrestling on television, but I will pull up old school matches from many years ago of yesterday's greats, and watch their matches on YouTube. I watch tons of old films and enjoy great movies

from some old Hollywood Classics to the most recent releases from Kevin Smith, Tarantino, or Scorsese. I love movies almost as much as I love reading. I keep a small tight circle of friends that look after my well being by checking in on me and making sure that I am doing alright. I don't go out much, and that's not such a bad thing, as it makes it all the better when I do get out for a movie or a ballgame.

Today, with the injuries I incurred through the years of athletics, especially wrestling, and a recent auto accident, I have good days and bad days. I try to stay to myself when I am having a bad day or two, and I try to make the most out of the good days that I do have. I go for walks on the good days. I try to take the time to reflect on my life and I take the time to appreciate what I do have in my life. I try not to give much thought to the things that I don't have or need. My needs are being met. I have healthy children, we have a roof over our heads, and we have food to eat. For these things, I am thankful.

During my lifetime, I have met countless people from around the world. I still have several friends in the wrestling business and I speak to some of them on a regular basis. I still stay in contact with some friends; fans and wrestlers from other countries. With that said, a man is lucky if in addition to one really good friend, he can count his true real friends, not just acquaintances on one hand. I always had Big Dan as a best friend. I also have a couple other guys that have been in and out of my life for too many years to count. This book wouldn't have been possible without the friendships that I have with Bill Hornbuckle and Bobby Reynolds. These two guys are real friends. My life is much the better for having them as friends and my life is all the better to have had these men in my life. Their insight, intelligence, and friendship has motivated me to be a better person in my personal life.

My circle of real friends is extremely tight, and these three guys, Danny, Bill, and Bobby, have enriched my life in the most positive of ways. In addition to them, my friendship with my brother Jimmy, rounds out my circle. My brother Jimm is one of the most grounded and down to earth guys that one could ever meet. He's a Chaplain with Hospice. The work he does takes a special person to deal with all he has to deal with on a daily

basis. I find safety, comfort, and satisfaction in being around these fine men. This is my personal thank you, so, “Thank you!” Also here’s your public acknowledgment to let you all four know just how much I love and respect each of you. I know all four of you are too modest to admit it, but you are all important, not just to me and my life, but to the many other lives that you touch and affect on a daily basis. Thank you all for a lifetime of friendship and brotherhood.

Looking back over my life and career has been insightful as well as cathartic for me. I only share certain areas of my daily life with a few friends. As I was coming to my conclusion in this chapter in the book, it was brought to my attention that, even though I thought I had a hold on wrestling, wrestling actually had its hold on me. It was a hold that I couldn’t escape. Professional wrestling seemed to have a submission hold on me for life. I recall Dean Malenko once saying to, “Use the business, don’t let the business use you.” I never forget that. But, sadly, that’s exactly what has happened through the years, the business used me. I’m now at a time in my life, and with the completion of this book, that I will use the business, and no longer allow it to use me. I am finally able to escape and counter the submission hold that professional wrestling had on me all these years.

Being a lifelong learner I’m sure I will continue to learn more about myself and about life. But, here are some items of importance that I have found that make my life worth living. Live life without the judgment of others. To have love for life and for one’s self and others is the single most important aspect of life. Spread love. Time spent with others, especially the ones you love is one of the best gifts you can give another. Perseverance, keep on keeping on. Perseverance is the key to making it out of any hell you may be going through and to help you reach any goals that you may have set for yourself. Just to merely exist on the planet is tough enough, but to dream and actually accomplish something worthwhile with your life, that’s living, and that takes perseverance. Love, don’t judge others, share your time wisely, and persevere.

Most people do good things but they only do them, conditionally. They try to capitalize on an opportunity to do good. They do good expecting something in return. The main reason they do these things is because they

have a fear of going to hell or they have the desire of heaven. I fear nor seek neither. These same people wouldn't necessarily still do these good deeds if there wasn't a hell or heaven. My personal belief is that I will try to do good because it's the right thing to do, not out of a fear or a desire. People like me are rare. I take great pride in knowing that at this point in my life, I have tried to do the right things for the right reasons.

We are all on borrowed time, and I try to make the most of the time I have left in this life. Time waits for no man. No man kicks out on the three count of time, but in the wrestling world, one must know when to step away and move on once you've had your spot in the limelight. When your mind tells your body to move one way, and your body doesn't respond as quick as it once did, you know. Athletes are the worst for sticking around when they are too far past their prime. The window for you, as an athlete to actually be at your peak is a small one, so enjoy it while you have the opportunity. Once you step back due to lack of movement, diminished reflexes, stiff joints, bad neck and back, let the bodies of others hit the floor and have no regrets.

'Non, je ne regrette rien.'

"No, I regret nothing."

"What in the world am I doing here? Here is home. Home is in the middle of a wrestling ring. Fans screaming, cheers, chants, and clapping! Excited eyes watching, a young boy's dream! Fluid moves being executed to perfection! Maybe a spot or two, and back down on the mat, it's at that moment, you realize, this is where I belong! In the middle of the ring. This is home!"

Bobby Blaze

"We were warriors my friend and we are a different breed. It has nothing to do with money or fame, but to just hear the roar of the crowd, and the feeling when you got them eating out of your hand. It can never be matched. The pop when the finish hit perfectly, whether you went over or not! It was an amazing thing and made my heart feel good. We are a dying breed my brother. But I raise my head high and am proud to have been in the ring and locker rooms with true warriors like yourself and many, many others. The game is different now and the values have changed. The art of knowing how to draw, and when and how to pop the people, and get them excited is a lost art that may never be recovered. At least I can say with pride, I wasn't the best but I was blessed and honored to have worked with the best. I can die a happy man knowing what I set out to do was to be respected by my peers and be part of this wonderful sport we called rasslin!"

Bull Pain